Decolonising African History.
Crises and transitions in African historiography (1950-1990)

by

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Abstract.

This thesis looks at the development of anglophone African historiography from the 1950s to the 1990s. The main question underlying this work is why, during the last thirty years, has African History been described as being "in crisis". The main argument is that the perception of a crisis has come from the perceived failure of historians to "decolonise" African History and to produce a "usable past." The thesis analyses the different ways in which these expectations have changed over time, and studies them from different perspectives.

First, the thesis looks at the way in which African History has been incorporated into universities. It argues that the particular circumstances of different academic environments have influenced historians' priorities and attitudes towards the study of African History. The analysis if these issues focuses on the study of six institutions: University of Cape Town in South Africa, University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, University of Ghana, School of Oriental and African Studies, Northwestern University, and the University of Wisconsin.

The second objective is to situate these cases in the context of wider historiographical changes in the study of the African past. This analysis examines the most significant changes in the development of the field. An attempt is also made to understand these changes in connection to wider transformations in the social sciences and the theory of knowledge. It is argued that dramatic changes occurred in the way we understand the production of knowledge during the last forty years are intimately connected with the idea of a crisis in African History.

Ultimately, this thesis tries to prove that the objective of producing a "usable past" has been evaluated in different ways over time. And that these forms of evaluation are related to particular institutional environments and to changes in our wider understanding of historical knowledge and its production. Thus, there have been different forms of crisis in the development of African History.

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Abbreviations.

ACEC	Advisory Committee for Education in the Colonies.
ACLS	American Council of Learned Societies.
ASA	African Studies Association (USA).
ASHA	African Heritage Studies Association.
ASP	African Studies Program (University of Wisconsin-Madison).
CAS	Centre of African Studies (University of Cape Town).
IAS	Institute of African Studies (University of Ghana).
IEMS	Institute of Extra-Mural Studies (University of Ghana).
IJAHS	*International Journal of African Historical Studies.*
IPE	Institute of Public Education (University of Ghana).
IUC	Inter-University Council.
JAH	*Journal of African History.*
JHSN	*Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria.*
NDEA	National Defense Education Act (USA).
NU	Northwestern University.
NUA	Northwestern University Archives.
PAS	Program of African Studies (Northwestern University).
PCTH	Program of Comparative Tropical History (University of Wisconsin-Madison).
SSRC	Social Sciences Research Council (USA).
TGCTHS	*Transactions of the Gold Coast and Togoland Historical Society.* (Later *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* THSG).
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies. (University of London).
UCT	University of Cape Town.
UDS	University of Dar es Salaam.
UGBL	University of Ghana, Balme Library.
UWM	University of Wisconsin-Madison.
UWMA	University of Wisconsin- Madison Archives.

INTRODUCTION.

There have been a significant number of books and articles devoted to the analysis of African historiography. It is, therefore, important to explain why is it important to write yet another study on this topic. The writing of African history poses significant challenges for the historian. Written sources, traditionally favoured by historians, are rare for most of the African past. Thus, historians have been faced with the problem of developing ways to understand and interpret other kinds of sources, such as oral material, archaeological remains, linguistic evidence, and ethnographic data. Unfortunately, the vast majority of studies in the field present a partial and unclear picture of how historians have managed to study the African past.

Historiography is above all a history of ideas. As such, it can be approached from a number of perspectives. As a young historian aspiring to do African history I became preoccupied with the low quality of the historiographical material available to students. This was the main motivation behind this thesis. At first, I was particularly concerned with presenting other young students a critical survey of the main trends in African history. However, as I became more familiar with the literature on African historiography I found that the ways in which African history was being portrayed and evaluated were very different from the ways that other areas of history are studied. This eventually became the main preoccupation of this thesis. Concepts such as the "usable past", decolonisation, relevance, and authenticity, being used to describe what African history was meant to be, became the main focus of my analysis.

Some may argue that this is not historiography but a study of how historiography has been written in the past. Although this is true to some extent, I have tried to complement my study by looking at the main areas that have attracted the attention of historians of Africa. This has been useful because it illustrates the difference between the rhetoric about African history and what historians actually do. One has to wonder why one should be concerned with such rhetoric if it does not represent the work of historians? First of all, it is interesting because no other field of history seems to be so concerned with such questions. As we will see in this thesis, these discourses about African History have been used to legitimate and gain support for the field. The fact that analysts of African History have

relied more heavily on the issues of relevance and authenticity to evaluate the field is a direct consequence of the moral and political issues that have surrounded it since its creation. Secondly, it is important to reflect upon the consequences of the emphasis given to these notions. One could argue that by overemphasising the importance of relevance and authenticity in the field of African History, historians have become isolated from the demands and expectations of the discipline of History. No area of study can survive or healthily develop in isolation. Thus, the results for historians of Africa may prove to be quite damaging.

Anyone who is familiar with the literature on African history has come across the idea that African history is "in crisis." This has been the most used phrase to describe the field since the 1970s. This judgement shows how there is a feeling that something has gone wrong in its development. This is not a view sustained by all historians I have spoken to. Even those who think there is a crisis would not agree on its causes and manifestations. What seems significant is that so much of the literature that talks about a crisis refers to the issues of relevance and authenticity.

Terence Ranger first used the notion of crisis in his article "Towards a usable past" published in 1976.[1] Ranger is usually remembered by this piece for his statement that "African history was in crisis." The fact that more recent reflections on the field have also expressed this view has led to the fact that Ranger's comment has been taken almost as an apocalyptic statement. However, when talking of a crisis Ranger was speaking of a transition, a period when historians of Africa were becoming aware of their mistakes and trying to move forward.

"The invitation to contribute a paper on African historical writing in English since the end of the Second World War gave me the opportunity to explore this sense of crisis; to look back into the golden age; to remember its excitements and achievements and to see clearly, for the first time the price that was paid for them. It also allowed me to focus more sharply my own feeling that if there is a crisis for African history there is a crisis of opportunity, and that out of the dispute about methodologies, content and relevance of African history there is emerging work which responds very satisfactorily to the challenges of the present."[2]

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[1] Ranger, T. "Towards a usable past." Fyfe, C. (ed.) *African studies since1945; a tribute to Basil Davidson.* Edinburgh, Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh, 1976. pp.17-30.

[2] *Ibidem.* p.17.

In this piece, Ranger spoke of two weaknesses in the work of historians that had resulted in "flabbiness." First, he said, there had been a need for "culture-heroes" due to the pressures of developing a methodology. Second, the mistakes of African historians had been, he said: "created by the fact that we were catering for interests that were too easily satisfied and too little demanding."[3] Thus, the challenge came now from the emergence of new audiences that were, allegedly, more difficult to please.

"The first is the audience constituted by historians of Europe, America, and the rest of the world, and the challenge which they present is that they still require to be shown good reasons why they should be interested in African history at all. The second is the audience constituted by younger students and intellectuals within Africa and the challenge which they present is that they find the present African historiographical interpretations "useless" to them and demand something more pertinent."[4]

Here Ranger set his standards to define what "good" African history would be. First, he said, it has to be recognised by the general academic community. Second, it has to be useful to Africans. Ranger, in principle, did not see a contradiction between these objectives, but he reflected upon the fact that many historians could not agree on how to conciliate these aims. The question that was raised was: Can historians apply the epistemological values that have been used to write the history of the Western world to the study of African history? This opposition between African history and Western history has created a problem that is at the root of how African history has been defined, and it is the main reason behind the widespread sense of crisis. Some historians have been able to escape this opposition by accepting that African history is just another field of historical research with its own particular requirements. However, other scholars have taken the question to the point in which African history appears to be a unique area of study that requires its own rules and standards.

In the late 1980s, for example, two works on historiography were published. Caroline Neale's *Writing independent history* and *Historians and Africanist history, a critique* by Temu and Swai.[5] The text by Temu and Swai was a badly-

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[3] *Ibidem.* p.18.

[4] *Ibidem.* p.22.

[5] Neale, C. *Writing independent history: African historiography, 1960-1980.* 1985. Temu, A. & B. Swai. *Historians and Africanist history: a critique.* 1981.

articulated critique of the historiography produced in the 1960s. In their view, not only had it been theoretically poor and empiricist, but it had been the result of its commitments to a "bourgeoisie ideology" and thus it had resulted in a history that was not relevant to the African masses. About the "historiographical revolution" of the 1960s they said:

"The methodological intervention continues to be not only empiricist but also superficial. Such has been termed 'the esoteric version of history': a history which, although purportedly written from below, remains history written from above. For this reason, this kind of history continues to be dedicated to the study of ideological and organizational forms of institutions and movements rather than their social content, and has been "miniutarized in this way into pedantic detailed studies lacking any general perspective.' Thus it is 'capable of rousing only a very limited interest.'"[6]

Temu and Swai were part of the Second Dar School of history that tried to develop a Marxist methodology for the study of African history. A school that said a lot about how it was meant to be written, but in fact, did little history and produced truly esoteric theoretical discussions. Temu and Swai criticised the historiographical production of the 1950s and 1960s because of its lack of relevance. However, they never reflected on the meaning of this concept. One reason for this is that within their Marxist perspective it was probably assumed that a Marxist interpretation would be interesting for peasants, labourers and the African public at large. This was due to its criticism of imperialism and the implication that it would produce class-consciousness and, thus, a social revolution. Temu and Swai, as many other historians had done, embraced a Marxist interpretation thinking that it would produce a history written from below. They never reflected about how this was to be translated into real benefits for the African public. Nor did they consider the numerous methodological problems that were involved in the writing of such history in the African context. From a historiographical point of view their work is even more deficient because they failed to produce a well-founded explanation or description of what African history had been. The reader is left with a number of badly argued accusations and a very poor understanding of the historical production of the period.

Caroline Neale devoted her book to the historiographical production of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. As the title suggests, she is concerned with the notion of an

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[6] Temu, A. and B. Swai. *Op.cit.* 1981. p. 3.

"independent history of Africa." In her opinion, both Nationalist -as she refers to the historiography of the 1960s- and Marxist historiography had been unable to produce this kind of history. She argued that both trends had been informed by the evolutionist assumptions that characterised Western historiography.[7] In her view, these interpretations were unable to capture the social realities of Africa because they were the result of a Western perspective. It is true that both Marxist and Nationalist approaches to history were plagued by problems. However, many of these were due to the lack or inadequacy of the sources, to the confusions between the disciplines involved, and, quite often, to plain misunderstandings of the processes to be analysed. To argue that these methods were not adequate simply because they were not of African origin (whatever that may be), is to deliberately avoid the analysis of the many and very real limitations of studying the African past.

Other scholars echoed Neale's criticism. One example is Jewsiewicki's analysis of the radical historiography of the 1970s.[8] In this piece, he attempted to reconstruct the epistemological principles that underpinned nineteenth century historiography. He argued that radical historiography, just as Nationalist or Africanist history before it, had been founded on such principles and thus had been unable to produce a truly relevant history of Africa.

"The evolutionist perspective on time and its linear conception remains the single most important structural obstacle for the production of powerful myths that are useful in the production of national and class-consciousness."[9]

For Jewsiewicki, the objective of African history was the transformation of the African social and political reality.[10] His conclusions are, once again, disappointing. Even when he devotes time to the analysis of the problems with concepts such as mode of production and class, he attributed the problems of historians to the European nature of the methodology rather than to the way in which that methodology had been used.

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[7] Neale, C. *Op.cit.* 1985. pp. 155-157.

[8] Jewsiewicki, B. "African historical studies: academic knowledge as 'usable past' and radical scholarship." *African Studies Review*. 32, (3), 1989. pp. 1-76.

[9] *Ibidem.* pp. 4-5.

[10] *Ibidem.* p.30.

Another example of a similar perspective, was expressed by Ralph Austen in an article where he asked can there be an autonomous African history?[11]

"It was Africanist historians who first insisted that indigenous terms did exist for articulating the past of a continent previously seen as only the object of action from the truly 'historical' outside world. If we can no longer accept the specific form in which these terms were set out neither can we replace them with 'universal' categories which ultimately represent only the Western culture from which they originate."[12]

These examples show that many analysts of African history have accepted that there is a tension between African and Western history. They have also attributed the deficiencies of the field to the incapacity of historians to produce a authentic and relevant history of Africa.

A brief analysis of African history that does not go into this matter can be found in the article by Joseph Miller, "History in Africa/Africa in History".[13] Miller centred his attention on the process by which historians of Africa have approached particular problems of African history at different moments in time.

"The disciplinary distractions of historians' early efforts in Africa thus derived not from inherent limits of social-science theory and structure they employed but rather from having to substitute conclusions from them for evidence from the past. Historians simply lacked sufficient data independent of their own imaginations to hold generalizing disciplines in heuristically secondary positions, supportive of their primary project of particularizing moments."[14]

Here Miller put his finger on two important problems: the issue of evidence, and the uses and abuses of interdisciplinary research. He acknowledged the limitations of the first works of historians of Africa, but tried to understand them in their own context. He realised that the lack of evidence at that point in time was bound to undermine the work of historians simply because the writing of history not only depends on creative theoretical approaches, but also requires evidence. Miller evaluated the work of historians in terms of the solutions they

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[11] Austen, R. "Africanist historiography and its critics: Can there be an autonomous African history?". Falola, T. (ed.) *African historiography: Essays in honour of Jacob Ade Ajayi.* Nigeria, Longman. 1993. pp.203-217.

[12] *Ibidem.* p.213.

[13] Miller, J. "History and Africa/Africa and History." *American Historical Review.* 104, (1), 1999. pp. 1-32.

[14] *Ibidem.* p. 29.

gave to particular historiographical problems, not according to vague notions of relevance and authenticity. On the contrary, he reflected quite extensively on the nature of the historical discipline and the ways in which African history has been one result of traditional (European) forms of historical knowledge, but has also forced some changes in the discipline as a whole.

The importance of Miller's analysis is that it is addressed to other historians. Miller knows that by portraying African history as a field regulated by obscure principles of interpretation he would be undermining the intellectual value of the field. Although he slightly overstates the influence that African history has had on other areas of history, he does present a sharp and critical analysis of the empirical and theoretical problems that historians of Africa had faced.

Why is it that Miller's analysis of African history is so rare? Part of the answer to this question lies on the notion of African studies. In the 1960s, African Studies emerged as an institutional form of approaching the study of Africa, particularly in the United States. The creation of African Studies made African historians into Africanists. In 1968 Gwendolen Carter described an Africanist as: "a scholar in a particular discipline who has an equal commitment to the scientific study of some aspect of African life and development and to the use of theoretical concepts and methodology of that discipline in both his research and his teaching."[15] However the creation of programs, particularly in the United States, soon evolved into a different project. As Martin and West put it: "...central to the creation of the Africanist enterprise in the United States was a fundamental shift in the construction of 'Africa' as an intellectual object."[16] Gradually, the attempt to produce a kind of knowledge that is particular to Africa, has undermined the concerns and problems of particular disciplines. The result has been that areas like African history continue to be evaluated in terms of its "authenticity" and "relevance" and not on the basis of the quality of its scholarship. Even when historians of Africa were concerned with these matters from the beginning, it seems to me that the continued emphasis given to these demands is a direct result

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[15] Northwestern University. Program of African Studies. *The first twenty years, 1948-1968.* 1968.

[16] Martin, W.G. and M.O. West. "The ascent, triumph and disintegration of the Africanist enterprise, USA." Martin, W.G. and M.O. West (eds.) *Out of one, many Africas. Reconstructing the study and meaning of Africa.* 1999. p.96.

of the assumption that African studies are independent from the principles on which modern scholarship is founded.

The reasons why this has occurred are diverse and complex. It is my view that part of the answer to this question can be found in the way African history and African studies have found their way into research institutions and universities. It is in these arenas that historians of Africa had to justify their field of study either in terms of its own worth or as a function of its relevance and authenticity. Thus, it is important to not only examine how these ideas have been presented in discourses about African history, but also to see how they have developed with the establishment of the field in universities.

Therefore, in this thesis I will examine the development of the discourse of African history that presents the notions of relevance and authenticity as the main imperatives of the field. I will also argue that this has affected the development of the field in two ways: First, discussions on these issues have overshadowed the debates on the interpretation of evidence and the problems of interdisciplinary research. This has seriously impoverished the quality of intellectual discussions among historians of Africa. Second, African history has been unable to prove its intellectual value because it has been too often portrayed as a unique field of research that cannot, or should not, be approached by those who are not enlightened by a particularly African form of knowledge. This has caused the isolation of the field from the general academic environment. I will also present a brief examination of the main trends that have guided the work of historians. This will show that there are a number of problems that historians of Africa have faced, that have not been properly analysed due to the attention that has been given to the issues of relevance and authenticity.

This analysis of African historiography is by no means exhaustive. The reader should not take this thesis as a guide of all that has been said about African history. It is, rather, a reflection upon the many levels at which African history has been understood and criticised. The study of such a wide and complex topic has forced me to concentrate the analysis on two processes: The development of African history in particular universities, and the evolution of trends, problems, and ideas in the work of historians.

The analysis of African history at the institutional level was centred on six universities: University of Ghana, University of Dar es Salaam, University of Cape Town, School of Oriental and African Studies, Northwestern University, and University of Wisconsin-Madison. These institutions have made important contributions, in one way or another, to the development of African history. I am sure the reader will question the fact that neither Ibadan nor the University of Witswatersrand were chosen. The decision was taken for purely logistical reasons, and I would hope that the issues raised will encourage comparisons and analyses with other institutions. I also made the decision not to include a North African university. This does not mean that I believe that North African history is not part of African history. North African history has been influenced by the study of African history, but it has also been affected by other intellectual elements such as Islamic historiography, of which I have a poor understanding. Thus I decided that, given the time and space limitations of this work, I would leave North African historiography for someone better informed in that area. History written in French, and French institutions were also excluded. With an overwhelming amount of material, the analysis of anglophone history was already a daunting task. Thus, I chose to leave Francophone historiography out of the scope of this work.

The sources used for the study of African history in universities were mainly memoirs, archives and interviews. In the case of archives I faced the problem that they were very unequal. While I had copious information in South Africa and Wisconsin, I found little information in Ghana and Dar es Salaam where I had to rely more heavily on interviews and printed material. Interviews were a separate problem. The conversations I had with historians of Africa were an invaluable source of information and a unique way to put my ideas under perspective. However, I have to warn the reader that I have made little direct use of this material. I have used it to supplement information that was obtained elsewhere or to fill gaps that could not be otherwise covered.

To understand the change of ideas and trends and the ways in which historians evaluate their own work, I have looked at book reviews published in different professional journals, namely *Africa, Journal of African History, Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, Journal of the Historical Society of Ghana, Journal of Southern African Studies and International Journal of African Historical Studies.*

These sources are obviously problematic. Mainly because reviewers tend to comment little about what actually is being written, and a lot about what should have been written. However, they were very useful to get a general idea of the general trends of interest among historians. They were also useful to identify particular works that had been chosen for analysis in this thesis. These texts were chosen because they were, in my opinion, good examples of historiographical trends of the time or because they had a particularly important impact on the writing of African history. This choice was difficult to make and I am aware that there are many important works that do not appear in this thesis.

Finally, I would like to add that in doing this thesis I have become more aware of the enormous importance of researching the intellectual history of Africa. Historiographical analysis should always be founded on a good understanding of the thinking of the time. Unfortunately, I was unable to do a thorough analysis of the intellectual history that has supported African history. This is both a deficiency of this work and of the historiography at large. Hopefully, the many questions left unanswered will encourage more research in this area.

CHAPTER I

Antecedents.

In 1948 Roland Oliver became the first professional historian to be appointed lecturer on the History of Africa. In the same year, university colleges were opened in Africa and the Carnegie Foundation awarded Northwestern University a grant for the development of a Program in African Studies. These events marked the emergence of African History in academic institutions. In the first section of this Chapter I will examine the processes which preceded and contributed to the above events.

Part 1.- African History before the 1950s.

Before professional historians turned their attention to Africa the most important body of historical knowledge was kept in the form of oral traditions. It is not the object of this thesis to examine the methodological and epistemological principles on which the recording and transmission of these traditions operate. However, it is important to note that much of the history of African societies was recorded in the form of oral traditions. This is crucial to understand the way African History has developed.

Written accounts about Africa appeared before the fifteenth century in the form of travel narratives and chronicles. These were mainly written in languages such as Greek, Latin, Arabic and Persian.[1] Egypt and the Maghrib are the areas with the largest amount of written historical accounts. The majority of early European works did not intend to produce a coherent historical narrative for the continent, but merely to reproduce some of the scarce information available about it. One has to remember that before the nineteenth century the geographical knowledge about Africa in Europe was limited. In contrast, the works of Arab travellers such as Battuta and Khaldun, who were much better informed, marked an important

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[1] Works by Herodotus, Polybius, Roman Pliny the Elder, and Ptolemy, contained information about Africa. Arabic chronicles such as *Tarikh of Khalifa b. Khayyat* presented a coherent historical narrative concerned with certain areas of the African continent that were known to Arab explorers and intellectuals.

step forward in the writing of historical accounts about Africa. It also marked the beginning of a productive and important Islamic historiographical tradition that was to produce a substantial body of historical literature both in Arabic and in African languages such as Hausa, Swahili, and Fulfulde. However, this literature developed independently from Western historiography. It is worth reflecting on the way in which Arab sources have been incorporated into modern understandings of African History. These works have been greatly appreciated for the wealth of information they offer, but little has been written about their historiographical role in African societies. Arabic accounts were at first considered to be the work of "external" elements in Africa. For many years, this view reinforced the idea that Africa had not produced any kind of historical documentation. Modern historiography has started to realise that Arab sources have been the result of the adoption and adaptation of Islam into African societies. Thus, these documents are part of the intellectual history of the continent and not just the testimony of external invaders. Hopefully this will promote a more careful analysis of these accounts and will be conducive for a better understanding of the historiographical value of these works.

After the fifteenth century there was an increase in the number of narrative works which made allusion to the African past. The most important development in this period was the growth in the number of works produced by Europeans who were beginning to acquire a better knowledge of Africa through their trading ventures. Areas that had traditionally benefited from a written tradition of historical accounts, such as the Maghrib, Egypt and Ethiopia, continued to enjoy this production through their own intellectual traditions. However, new areas such as Senegambia, the Niger delta, Benin, the kingdom of Congo, Angola and the region around the Zambezi also began to benefit from the attention of early European writers such as missionaries and traders. These works had been incorporated into academic historical accounts as sources of the African past given the significant amounts of information they provide. However, they have had a limited impact in the shaping of modern historiography of Africa.

It is important to highlight the significance of this "silence" about the African past. This was more a perception than a reality. African peoples maintained their historical knowledge in a variety of non-written forms. However, these were not recognised as history by Europeans. Thus the conclusion that African peoples

had no history was a reflection of European perceptions of history. This was reinforced by the absence of "tangible history" such as archaeological remains like those found in South Asia, South America and Central America.

The myth about peoples without history grew during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the nineteenth century European explorers went beyond the coastal areas and penetrated into regions where Europeans had been unable to go. This group had a variety of motivations, but their observations were informed by the scientific curiosity common at those times. An important part of the scientific endeavour of the nineteenth century was to produce an evolutionary understanding of human races. Thus, the writings of explorers were concerned with classifying African peoples according to the notions of civilisation accepted at that time. The accounts of explorers were an important element in the creation of an "image of Africa" that emphasised the idea of peoples without history.

With the terrain opened by explorers, missionaries and administrators followed. These two groups also wrote about their views of African peoples, and the majority of their works undermined the role of history for the understanding of African societies. The general view was that Africans had not achieved the levels of progress and "civilisation" that could be observed in Europe. Thus it was assumed that African peoples did not have a past that was worthy of study or even possible to study given the lack of documents.

Most of the historical literature of this period was concerned with the activities of Europeans in Africa, and little attention was given to the lives of Africans. Some examples of these early works are *The history of the rise, progress and accomplishment of the abolition of the African slave trade, by the British Parliament* by Thomas Clarkson (London and Philadelphia, 1808), *An introduction to the study of colonial history* by A.P. Newton (London, 1919), *History of the Gold Coast of West Africa* by A.B. Ellis(London, 1893), *The history of the Gold Coast and Ashanti* by W.W. Claridge(London, 1915) among many others.

At the turn of the century scholars also started to produce historical accounts that referred to Africa. These appeared within the context of the increasing interest in the economic history of Britain and later with the imposition of colonial rule in

Africa. Examples of this literature are *The constitution and finance of English, Scotch, and Irish Joint Stock Companies to 1720* by W.R. Scott (Cambridge, 1910), *The Company of Royal adventurers trading into Africa* by G.F. Zook (Lancaster, Pa., 1919), *History of the Gambia* by J.M. Gray (Cambridge, 1940), *East Africa and its invaders* by R. Coupland (Oxford, 1938), among others.

This body of literature came to be known as "colonial" or "imperial" history, because it concentrated on the activities of Europeans in Africa in the context of colonial rule and imperialist expansion. The bulk of these works perpetuated the idea that African peoples had no history because of their "obvious primitive stage" and the lack of written evidence. The lack of written records allowed historians to believe that history in Africa was a pointless if not impossible endeavour. These ideas were rarely challenged, since they were also instrumental for the justification of colonial rule and European expansion.

After World War II the relationship between Britain and its colonies went through a period of significant changes, and it became more important to acquire a better knowledge of the peoples inhabiting colonial domains. At the same time, a young generation of scholars, many of whom had been in close contact with colonial peoples through military service, returned to Britain with an increased interest in the cultures that existed beyond Europe. The combination of these elements opened the possibilities for a new understanding of Africa's past.

The historiography that began to take shape in the late 1940s and early 1950s was derived from these changes and it was the seed of new attitudes towards the study of Africa and its past. At those early stages, however, there were many characteristics in common between the so-called colonial history and the emerging African History. The relationship between the two areas of study became problematic in the context of decolonisation and African independence. It will be seen later how African History came to be identified as the antithesis of colonial historiography and how the problem of "decolonising" African History emerged and developed.

A large amount of the works that appeared in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were produced by metropolitan writers. However there was also a significant literature produced in the colonies, both by African writers and

authors of European descent. South Africa, for example, was one area where such early literature developed.

During the nineteenth century, important works by non-professional historians were those of James Stuart, A.T. Bryant and G.M. Theal. These works provided a substantial amount of information, which has been incorporated into academic historical writing. Similar to many works of their time, they promoted the idea that Africans had had little impact in the development of modern South Africa, and that they were, as the Dutch, also late-comers to the continent.

Particularly important was the work developed by professional historians during the first half of the twentieth century. Given its particular historical conditions, South Africa had developed universities that supported an important amount of professional historical research. The period between 1918 and 1945 saw the development of two major historiographical traditions: liberal and Afrikaner-nationalist.[2] Given the fact that the Afrikaner tradition was written in Afrikaans, its analysis lies out of the scope of this thesis. Therefore, I will focus my attention on the liberal tradition which was mainly written in English, and which had a larger impact on the development of anglophone African historiography in South Africa in the late sixties and seventies.

South African liberals were particularly concerned with the development of white racism and segregation in the Republic. However, within Liberalism there were two main currents. One was mainly interested in political history and basically on the history of the white population. The second made an important switch towards the study of economic interaction between the African and white peoples of South Africa. There were three key figures representing these historiographical tendencies: Eric A. Walker, William Macmillan and Cornelius de Kiewiet.

At the centre of the liberal interpretation of South African History was the notion of the frontier, first introduced by William Macmillan. He argued that the origins of white racism could be found in the early contacts between the trek-Boers and

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[2] Bundy, C. "An image of its own past? Towards a comparison of American and South African historiography." *Radical History Review*. 46/47, 1990. p.123.

the native African population that took place in the historical frontier between both peoples.[3] With this in mind he pioneered in the study of economic and social relations between the white (particularly Afrikaans speakers) and black populations, using the notion of interaction as his main object of research.

Eric Walker was Chair of History in the University of Cape Town from 1911 until 1936 when he was appointed to the Chair of Imperial and Naval History in Cambridge University. His most influential work, *The Frontier Tradition in South Africa,* was first delivered as a lecture in Rhodes House, Oxford in 1930. In it he attempted to find an overall historical explanation to the success of racist policies which he saw as primitive and unacceptable in a modern democracy. Influenced by Macmillan's notion of the frontier, and by the work of Frederick Jackson Turner on American History, Walker argued that South African white racism was a product of the frontier. However, unlike Macmillan, he did not emphasise the notion of interaction nor did he take up the research on the economic aspects of this relationship.[4]

Cornelius de Kiewiet studied under Macmillan and was deeply influenced by his work. His most important contribution, *The Imperial Factor,* is still considered a classic in South African historiography. In his interpretation of South African History, he incorporated Macmillan's concerns for social and economic changes.[5]

Thus, the notion of the frontier was an important element in the interpretation of these authors. Their approaches, however, were different. Walker saw the frontier as a historical space where white settlers shaped their racist ideas through their contacts with the African population. For Macmillan and de Kiewiet the frontier was a space of economic and social interaction in which both black and white population produced a new kind of society.

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[3] The notion of the frontier as a historical space of interaction and cultural development has been important in many historical traditions. The most well known is probably the case of the United States and the work of Frederick Jackson Turner, *The significance of the frontier in American history* (1963). But it was also important in the study of colonial penetration in Latin America and the creation of *mestizo* and *creole* cultures.

[4] Saunders, C.C. *The making of the South African past.* 1988. p. 114-115.

[5] *Ibidem.* p. 96.

The notion of interaction was important in the development of South African historiography. However, it also had a significant impact on the way in which South African historians saw the South African past in relation to the history of the rest of the African continent. The early contacts and relatively intense interaction between European settlers and African peoples, and the emergence of a particular kind of political economy and society, fed into the notion of South African exceptionalism that was widely held among historians of Africa and South Africa.

Despite the importance of the innovations introduced by Macmillan and de Kiewiet, their work did not become part of the mainstream historiographical tradition.[6] Few historians became interested in economic problems and how they affected the African population. Among them was H.M. Robertson, a Senior Lecturer in the department of Economic History at the University of Cape Town (UCT) since 1930. He wrote a long article entitled "150 Years of Economic Contact between Black an White" which did not have any important impact among other historians. A student of his, Sheila van der Horst, followed his steps and produced a thesis that was published in 1941 as *Native Labour in South Africa.* This was, in the words of a contemporary historian: "the most important single study of policy towards blacks to be completed in these decades".[7]

Macmillan and de Kiewiet's contributions would have to wait until the seventies to be seriously taken up by historians. In contrast, Walker became a leading historian both in South Africa and abroad. His work exemplifies the dominant approach by liberal historians. The obvious question is why this happened, why historians of South Africa failed to take up the contributions of Macmillan and de Kiewiet despite its academic value and relevance. The racist policies of segregation that were developing in South Africa benefited from the views that

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[6] Both Macmillan and de Kiewiet had short careers in South Africa. Macmillan had taught at Rhodes University College from 1910, and later in the University of the Witswatersrand from 1917. By the 1930s Macmillan grew uncomfortable with his situation at Wits and his outspoken criticism of Government segregationist policies soon made his position untenable. He presented his resignation in 1933 and left for Great Britain. De Kiewiet left for England in 1925 and later accepted an invitation to teach in Iowa (USA) after finishing his doctorate. He worked at Cornell University and became president of Rochester University in 1951.

[7] Saunders, C.C. *Op.cit.* 1988. p.119.

African peoples had no history or significant political or economic development. This reinforced the view that disciplines such as Anthropology and not History were better equipped for their study.

The significance of the South African case could not be more evident. Here was an African country that had actually developed a historiographical tradition of its own. However, this was dominated by the political concerns of a deeply divided population of European descent. English-speakers and Afrikaans-speakers disagreed on many issues, but both groups generally accepted that Africans were of little importance in the development of South African society. A significant change in the political balance would be needed to transform these ideas.

An important development during the nineteenth century was the increase in the amount of historical writing by Africans. West Africa and South Africa produced the majority of these authors. Samuel Johnson is probably the best example of this in West Africa. His *History of the Yorubas*[8] was written in the nineteenth century, although it was not published until the beginning of the twentieth century. This work has been very influential in modern historiography. It provides a significant amount of historical detail and presented a general framework for the understanding of Yoruba History. Moreover, Johnson's work raised awareness on the importance of oral traditions for the historian of Africa. His collection of traditions was obviously quite unsophisticated when compared to how traditions are studied nowadays. However, his work in this area is important because much of the material he used is no longer available. Despite this, his work had little impact on the professional historians of his time, and did little to convince them of the importance of African History as he presented it.[9]

Black writers also made an important contribution to South African historiography during the last decades of the nineteenth century. As Samuel

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[8] Johnson, S. *The history of the Yorubas from the earliest times to the beginning of the British Protectorate*. London, 1921

[9] Carl Reindorf was another important historian of the time with his *History of the Gold Coast*. There were also other authors who did not produce books but who expressed their opinions and knowledge about history in the lively press that developed in the Gold Coast and Nigeria. Although historians have started to appreciate the importance of these authors, more work needs to be done on the intellectual history of this period.

Johnson, these writers belonged to the educated elites produced by missionary education. They attempted to recover the precolonial history of their communities through their oral traditions. These writers were, in general, more radical in their evaluation of their contacts with Europeans than Johnson and other West African writers. They addressed issues of dispossession, resistance, race and nationalism,[10] which were not addressed by professional South African historians until the 1970s. A first example of these writers was Solomon T. Plaatje, who published in 1916 *Native Life in South Africa before and since the European War and the Boer rebellion.* In this work Plaatje included issues like the participation of Africans in the South African war, and an analysis of the Native Lands Act of 1913 in the Orange Free State which were not generally addressed by mainstream historians of the time.[11]

Silar Modiri Molema was a young medical student in Scotland during the war. During that time he wrote *The Bantu, Past and present. An Ethnographical and historical study of the native races of South Africa.* This work was less radical that Plaatje's and was set to prove that Africans could achieve progress under European tutelage.[12] These works introduced elements that were adopted later by professional historians of Africa, for example, the re-evaluation of African cultures and the use of oral traditions. Although I would not go as far to say that professional historians followed the tradition initiated by these African authors, one can argue that it was their work that gave historians some clues about how to study the African past.

Towards the turn of the century, across the Atlantic, a new approach to African History started to develop. In general, professional historians in the United States showed little interest in the study of African History. Only a few individuals and institutions, that were interested in the study of the African-American population in the United States, marginally approached the study of African History.

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[10] Bozzoli, B. and P. Delius "Radical history and Southern African society." *Radical History Review.* 46/47, 1990. p. 14.

[11] Saunders, C.C. *Op.cit.* 1988. p. 107. It is also worth mentioning that Platjee also published a novel, *Mhudi,* in 1930. This was in part concerned with the impact of the Mfecane, and was based on the recollections of his family and hence was aimed to produce a moral judgement supported by oral evidence. It was the first novel in English to be published by a black South African.

[12] Saunders, C.C. *Op.cit.* 1988. p. 108.

Unfortunately, the growing professionalisation of the historical discipline that occurred at the beginning of the century also coincided with the peaking of racism among American intellectuals. This created and important obstacle for the development of African-American History and African History.[13]

Among the founders of African-American History were W.E.B. du Bois (1868-1963) and Carter G. Woodson (1875-1950). In 1895, du Bois was the first black person to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard and the first to earn a degree in History.[14] Carter G. Woodson was the second Black American, after du Bois, to obtain a doctorate in History. He was the founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. He also established the *Journal of Negro History* and sponsored research by young historians. These activities had an important impact in the development of African-American History as a valid historical speciality. The careers of both scholars were rather different, however their contributions were long lasting. Du Bois' influence came directly from his scholarly production. His works, *Suppression of the African Slave Trade, The Philadelphia Negro,* and *Black Reconstruction* have been an important source of inspiration for modern historians, both black and white. Woodson, on the other hand, did not produce such influential work. However he created both an Association and a Journal, promoting research and publication of works on African-American History. By doing so, he created conditions for the development of African-American History as a valid field of historical enquiry.[15]

The achievements of these men are remarkable given the fact that the opportunities for black Americans in the area of higher education were extremely limited. A number of black authors wrote about Africa and the African-American experience, however they were seen as "amateurs" by the academic establishment. Du Bois and Woodson were important precisely because they initiated the tradition of African-American scholarship within the academic system.

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[13] Meier A. and Elliot Rudwick. *Black History and the historical profession, 1915-1980.* 1986. p. 3.

[14] His thesis was entitled The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870. It was later published and became a classical work on African-American historiography.

[15] Meier, A. and Elliot Rudwick. *Op.cit.* 1986. pp. 70-71.

The main aim of African-American historians at this early stage was to explore the role played by the black population of the United States in the formation and consolidation of the country. They tried to integrate the African-American element into the general interpretation of American History. This had a relatively good reception in academic circles. However, the history of the African-American population was still not totally accepted. One reason for this was probably the universalistic views that dominated American professional history.

"Over a hundred years no component of the synthesis of ideas which went to make up the norm of historical objectivity had been more central and enduring than 'universalism.' Truth was one, the same for all peoples. It was, in principle, accessible to all and addressed to all. Particularistic commitments -national, ethnic, regional, religious, ideological, were seen as enemies of the objective truth... American historians, as compared to historians of other nationalities, had always been especially attached to universalist norms, and were proud that these norms had strengthened as the profession developed- a particularly urgent task in a country with strong regional loyalties, and a multiethnic population. The process of professionalisation has seen the gradual victory of national over particularistic interpretations...."[16]

The integrationist approach had an adverse effect on the potential development of African History. It forced historians to focus their attention on the activities of the black population in the United States, but did not encouraged the study of the African roots of this population. This was left to the studies of folklore and popular culture.

So far we have seen that there were only a few writers interested in the history of Africa before the arrival of Europeans, many of them Africans. We have also seen that their impact was very limited and did not achieve a change on the status of African History. This can be attributed to a number of factors. The first and most significant was the political situation of Africa itself. Under colonial rule, the study of the African past was seen not only as uninteresting, but even subversive. After all, the colonial project, and segregationist views in South Africa and the United States, were founded on the belief that African peoples had achieved no social, political or economic progress of their own. The best historians could do was to concentrate their efforts on the study of the civilising project undertaken by Western powers. The fact that Africans or their descendants were also actors in

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[16] Novick, P. *That Noble dream.* 1988. p. 469.

this project was obviously a reality that historians were reluctant or incapable to see.

The blindness of historians here cannot only be attributed to the need to justify and reinforce colonial power or a racist state. Much of the reluctance to see something interesting in African History came from the discipline itself. The element of universalism that I attributed to American historiography was also present in European History, and it had its share of impact on the resistance to accept the study of African History. Moreover, historians were not ready to accept that the study of "primitive" peoples was the role of historians. Proper History dealt with developed and progressive peoples, with their sophisticated political life and their outstanding intellectual production. African peoples were not perceived as progressive or developed, and they did not seem to have produced any major contribution to world history. Historians were looking for a history of economic and social progress, the history of civilisation that they saw as the major achievement of Europe. They saw nothing of this in Africa and consequently left it out of their concerns. So strong was this view about the state of the African continent that the achievements of Egypt, for example, were interpreted as non-African. Egypt was seen as the result of the intervention of foreigners and not as a result of African developments. Even now, scholars have to argue for the African roots of Egyptian civilisation. A second element that played against African History in the mind of historians was the issue of sources. As it was said above, a large amount of African historical data was recorded in oral form, something historians of the time were unlikely to accept as a valid source for serious historical research

After two world wars and an economic depression in both Europe and the United States, a change in the image of Africa began to take place. Changes in British colonial policy, an emergent African nationalism, and innovations in the field of history produced the perfect environment for the emergence of African history.

Part 2.- The opening of institutions.

The history of African History as an academic field of study is intimately linked to the introduction of universities in Africa. Before the Second World War, only South Africa had an educational system that provided university education. South African universities, however, did not show any interest in the study of African History. There were some institutions in Britain and the United States that were concerned with the study of Africa; however, none of them showed a specific interest in its history. This lack of institutional interest was obviously a reflection of the political situation of colonial Africa. This situation however was about to change and with it the attitude of British, American and the existing African institutions towards the study of African History.

On the British side there were some institutions that focused on the study of African societies. Well-established universities, such as Cambridge and Oxford, had long experience training colonial personnel. Oxford housed the Institute of Colonial Studies under the direction of Miss Margery Perham, Reader in Colonial Administration. The Institute collected a significant amount of documentary material for the study of colonial territories, particularly Africa. Cambridge had a Professorship on Imperial and Naval History for many years. One of its incumbents was Professor E.A. Walker, a fact that proves once more his importance in the area of colonial and imperial historiography.

There were other institutions specifically devoted to the study of Africa. There was, for example, the International African Institute that was founded in 1926 under the chairmanship of Lord Lugard. The Institute carried out important research on problems of colonial administration, but also supported research on anthropology and linguistics. There was also the Rhodes Livingstone Institute in Northern Rhodesia that was founded in 1938. This, like the International African Institute, gave support to studies of anthropology and linguistics, but all within the context of the analysis of colonial development and policies. Finally, the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) first opened in 1917 as part of the

University of London.[17] By 1947, it was the only institution in Britain with a department devoted exclusively to African Studies.

The study of Africa in British institutions was inextricably linked to the needs of the Government and the colonial administration. Institutions like SOAS had two specific functions. The first was to provide colonial servants and military personnel with a basic practical knowledge of the languages and cultures of the people in the colonies. To do this, they also fulfilled a second function, which was to undertake research, mainly in anthropology and linguistics. In 1947, for example, SOAS undergraduate degree offerings concentrated on the teaching of oriental languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Tamil and Urdu. No African language was offered at this level. At the postgraduate level, especially at the doctoral level, a student could choose to specialise on African languages such as Swahili. However, if a student wanted to specialise on history, the only options available were on the History of India, History of the Near and Middle East, and History of the Far East with special reference to China.[18] These were the approved areas by the Board of History of the University of London. Few students, however, pursued degrees at the School. An analysis of the student numbers from 1942 to 1948 shows that from the 5,348 students that passed through the School during this period only 4% were reading for higher degrees and another 4% were enrolled in First Degrees and University Diplomas. The largest numbers of students were registered as coming from the Armed Forces and Crown (34%) and the Colonial and Foreign Services (12%), followed by Missionaries (11%).[19]

British institutions did not have as their main role the training of Africans. Despite this, there were a small number of African students in British institutions. Later it will be seen how significant and influential these African students would become, particularly in the field of history.[20] The situation of African Studies in general, and of African History in particular, in British institutions was certainly

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[17] The School adopted this name until 1938 when its Charter was amended.

[18] SOAS. *Calendar*. 1947-48. pp. 93-94.

[19] SOAS. *Report of the Governing Body, Statement of Accounts and Departmental Reports*. 1947-48. p. 30. The rest of the students were registered as intercollegiate students, School examinations, Bank and Business Houses , State Scholars and others.

[20] Dike and Biobaku are the two most important examples of the importance of this group of early African students in the field of History.

not flourishing before the late forties. Unfortunately, it wasn't any better in the continent itself. As it was mentioned above, only South Africa had proper universities in which the study of Africa could have developed. This, unfortunately, was not the case.

South Africa had several English-speaking universities such as the University of Cape Town, the University of the Witswatersrand, Durban University and Rhodes University. Despite being located in the African continent, these institutions were created by European initiative and were founded on the same academic and intellectual traditions of European universities. In this respect, their attitudes towards the study of Africa were not very different from those of British institutions.

The first South African institution to introduce the study of African societies was the University of Cape Town (UCT). In 1921 the University created the School of African Life and Languages, which in 1930 became the School of African Studies. The need for such a school could probably be traced to the Milner Native Affairs Commission of 1903-1905.[21] The plans presented by UCT to the Government in 1920 envisaged a faculty of significant size, presided over by a Dean, the teaching of languages from all over Africa, and research work on areas like ethnology, religion and psychology. All these plans were cut short by a reduction in the initial budget approved for the school later that year.[22] The school's problems were aggravated by the fact that it had been unable to attract students. It mainly offered an in-service diploma and vacation courses to magistrates and missionaries. This failure was attributed to "a negative attitude to these qualifications in the Union Native Affairs Department..."[23] Despite these setbacks the School survived, thanks to the perseverance of the Vice-Chancellor Beattie. After 1934 he persuaded the university to reinstate the Chair of Social Anthropology and to set up a full-time Chair in Bantu Languages.[24]

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[21] The South African Native Affairs Commission was appointed by Alfred Milner. It was in charge of formulating recommendations for Africans in unified South Africa. Its report was a clear presentation of the policy of segregation and it was the antecedent of much of the legislation that followed the act of union.

[22] The initial budget approved for the school was £3000, but this was cut to £1500 by the Government on the December 24, 1920. Levy, L. "The School of African Studies, UCT." 1971.

[23] Phillips, H. *The University of Cape Town.* 1993.p.270.

[24] *Ibidem.*

The School concentrated in three areas, Social Anthropology and Archaeology, Linguistics, and Native Law and Administration (later Comparative African Government and Law). Distinguished members of the profession occupied the Chair of Social Anthropology at UCT. Its first incumbent was A.R. Radcliffe-Brown from 1920 to 1925. Isaac Schapera occupied this Chair from 1935 to 1950; and Monica Wilson succeeded him from 1952 to 1973. The area of Archaeology was developed by Associate Professor John Goodwin from 1923 to 1959. He is nowadays considered, by South African archaeologists, as one of the founders of their field. The Chair of African Linguistics was presided for many years by Professor G.P. Lestrade (1935-1962) and also benefited from the collaboration of distinguished lecturers such as Dr. A.C. Jordan, the first Black student to be awarded a Ph.D. at UCT. Dr. H.J. Simons was in charge of Native Law and Administration from 1938 to 1966.

Despite the fact that these men and women were generally committed to the understanding of African cultures they could not change the prejudices of their times. The activities of the School remained marginal to the mainstream educational concerns of the University.

The concept of African studies adopted at UCT was not the same that would develop in other African countries or in the UK and the United States from the late 1940s. In the words of a contemporary critic of this perspective: "It understood 'African' as 'Bantu', and 'African' Studies as 'Bantu' Studies. Historically, this comprised the study of Native Administration, Anthropology, and at times Bantu languages. This notion of the African as the Other is highly racialised, just as it is localised: both the 'African' and 'Africa' exist inside South Africa."[25] But despite being inside South Africa, this 'African' element was not integrated into the mainstream studies of the University, just as it was not considered an integral element of South African society. In that respect, this notion of African studies and its institutional image, the School of African Studies, were a reflection of the contradictions that characterised South African society.

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[25] Mamdani, M. "Centre of African Studies: Some preliminary thoughts". Seminar paper. November 29. University of Cape Town, Centre of African Studies. 1996.p.2.

Individual members of the School of African Studies were very vocal in their criticism of the difficult racial situation in South Africa. Jack Simons was one of them. In 1951 he was Lecturer in Native Law and Administration and in a letter to a former student of his he said:

"You are quite right in your determination to carry on with academic work and do some research. There are so few of us trying to adopt scientific methods in the study of our inter-racial situation, that we cannot afford to lose anyone who shows real interest and understanding. Unfortunately, our society as a whole is not yet sufficiently alive to the need of this approach, and subsequently facilities and resources for research, and even teaching, are still grossly inadequate."[26]

Simons's interest in the study of African peoples and his opinions in this respect were also informed by his political activities as a member of the South African Communist Party. Both positions eventually caused him to be banned from teaching and forced him to go into exile in 1965.

Another innovative member of the School of African Studies was Professor Monica Wilson. She would eventually become an important figure in the development of African History at UCT. Since her arrival to the School, she was adamant about the importance of incorporating African students to the study of Social Anthropology. This suggestion was, however, very radical at a time when South Africa was in the process of introducing apartheid.[27]

The main contribution of the School of African studies to the development of new approaches to the study of African societies was done mainly through the contribution of its individual members, such as Monica Wilson and Jack Simons. Some departments of the school would eventually merge with other departments such as African Languages in 1967 and Archaeology in 1968, slowly giving place to the integration of African Studies in the mainstream activities of the university. In 1976 the School became the Centre of African Studies, but its activities, philosophy and functions had changed substantially. The experience of the School of African Studies at UCT cannot but leave us with a sense of a lost opportunity. It

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[26] Letter from Jack Simons to Miss Payn. January 18, 1951. Academic Correspondence. *Simons Collection.* UCT.

[27] The National Council for Social Research, Union Education Department. "Research needs in Social Anthropology." Original draft by Professor I. Schapera; revised to incorporate suggestions from Professors C.M. Doke, J.D. Krige, and Monica Wilson. 1948. *Monica and Godfrey Wilson Papers.* UCT.

had the necessary human resources to become the leader of a revolution in the study of African peoples. Unfortunately, its political and social setting got in the way of such a process. Innovations in the field would eventually come to UCT from the outside, and would penetrate the university through different channels. The School had little to do with that process, and its successor, the Centre of African Studies, was left to redefine to role of African studies in a new political and social context.[28]

The institutional situation north of the Limpopo was radically different. There were no universities and Africans who wanted to obtain university degrees had to travel abroad. During the first half of the colonial period there were many attempts by the educated elites in African territories, such as Nigeria and the Gold Coast, to promote the provision of higher education in the continent. These attempts resulted in the creation of several colleges that provided post-secondary education for Africans.

The oldest of these, Fourah Bay College, was established as the result of efforts of Dr. Edward Wilmot Blyden and the support of Christian missionaries in Sierra Leone. It offered a general post-secondary education until 1874 when the Church Missionary Society decided to widen the scope of its theological seminary. The result of this was the affiliation of the College to Durham University in 1876. In this way, and for the first time, university courses were available in West Africa. However, Durham University controlled the contents of the courses, the examinations and the degrees that were awarded.

There were other colleges such as Gordon Memorial College, which was created in 1902 in Khartoum, the Sudan. Makerere College was established outside Kampala, Uganda in 1921. This offered vocational training in medicine, engineering, surveying and teacher education. Yaba Higher College in Nigeria was established in 1930. It provided training for medical assistants and some diplomas in science,

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[28] In his seminar paper "The Centre of African Studies, some preliminary thoughts" Mamdani questioned the role for such a centre in an African university and an African country. Even though his criticism of the notion of African studies in South Africa can be valid, this is not enough to affirm that African studies have no role to play in African institutions. The University of Ghana in Legon, had such a center and its contributions to the study of African cultures have been significant.

engineering, survey, agriculture, animal health and forestry. Finally, Achimota College in the Gold Coast was officially opened in 1927.

Africans were not completely satisfied with the education they were offered by these institutions. Frequently, students who graduated from them did not have their degrees recognised in England, or were discriminated against when looking for employment. For this reason there was a general suspicion against notions of "africanising" education. This was interpreted as a lowering of standards in the education Africans were receiving. African elites were therefore constantly pushing for the establishment of institutions which would provide an education of the same standards as that provided in Britain, and which would grant degrees that would be recognised internationally.[29]

In the mid-1930s several factors affected the attitude of the Colonial Governments towards Higher Education in Africa. Various colonies presented an unstable social, economic and political situation, which became a threat to the colonial power.[30] Linked to this, was a growing critical attitude, both local and international, towards British colonial policies. These factors made the Colonial Office realise that it was important to reformulate colonial policy. There was a need to address the causes of discontent in the colonies and to define new kinds of relationships between Britain and its domains. An important element which contributed to the revision of Colonial policy in educational matters was the publication in 1922 of a report by the African Education Commission under the auspices of the Phelps-Stokes Fund and the foreign mission societies of North America and Europe. This prompted the Colonial Office to establish in 1923 an Advisory Committee on Native Education in Africa, transformed in 1929 into the Advisory Committee of Education in the Colonies (ACEC).[31]

Between 1932 and 1938 the ACEC directed important efforts to formulate a consistent policy on university education for Africans. It was also during this

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[29] Nwauwa, A.O. *Imperialism, academe and nationalism: Britain and university education for Africans, 1860-1960.* 1997. p. 82-83.

[30] One important event in this respect was the West Indian Crisis between 1935 and 1937.

[31] Maxwell, I.C.M. *Universities in Partnership. The Inter-University Council and the growth of higher education in developing countries 1946-1970.* 1980. p. 5.

period that the British Government, for the first time, contemplated the possibility of financing a scheme of higher education in Africa.[32] University education for Africans was seen as part of the new plans of the Colonial Office to promote self-government and to initiate the creation of an African civil service.

These issues received greater attention after 1942 when Oliver Stanley took over the affairs of the Colonial Office. Two events were crucial for the eventual creation of universities in Africa. First, the establishment of the Second Colonial Development and Welfare Fund in 1945, which contributed to the financing of new institutions of higher education in Africa. Second, the appointment of the Asquith and Elliot Commissions on Higher Education in July 1943. These committees were charged with investigating the conditions of higher education in Africa and to make recommendations in this regard. The Asquith Commission dealt with the state of education in British colonies in general. The Elliot Commission dealt specifically with West Africa. Both commissions published their reports on 1945. The commissions recommended that three institutions already established in tropical Africa would become university colleges. These were at Achimota in the Gold Coast, which started its activities as the University College of the Gold Coast in 1948. Khartoum in Sudan was opened in 1946, and Makerere College in Uganda which was inaugurated in 1949. In addition to these a new institution was to be created in Ibadan, Nigeria, which opened in 1948.[33]

The Asquith Commission also recommended the formation of an Inter-University Council (IUC) that would be constituted by representatives of all universities in Britain. This Council was established in 1946 and was conceived as a "co-operative organisation of universities of Great Britain and the colonies charged with the tasks of co-operating with existing colonial universities and fostering development and colonial colleges in their advance towards university status".[34]

Work of the IUC in African territories was to be guided mainly by the reports of the Asquith and Elliot Commissions. Behind the proposals of these reports there

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[32] Nwauwa, A.O. *Op.cit.* 1997 p. 68.

[33] These institutions started to operate as colleges of the University of London, just as other metropolitan universities had done before becoming independent universities.

[34] Agbodeka, F. *A history of the University of Ghana.* 1998. pp. 10-11.

were two main political considerations. First, the creation of universities in Africa was an essential element in the process of preparing African territories for self-government. Second, it would provide the appropriate environment for the establishment of an international relationship between Britain and its domains. To fulfil these expectations, the Asquith report established five guiding principles.

The first was quality. The goal would be to establish institutions, which could provide education of the same standards as that offered by British universities. "An institution with the status of an university which does not command the respect of other universities brings no credit to the community it serves" the commission said.[35] Members of the IUC were aware of the complaints related to education provided in Africa, for this reason they were determined to follow the recommendation of the Elliot commission when they insisted that "African academic standards in no way inferior to those of British Universities are essential."[36] The second principle was that universities should achieve a balance between professional and technical education. It was obvious for the Commission that one extreme or the other would be self-defeating if the goal were to produce individuals who could guide their co-nationals in the road of self-government and economic progress. The third and fourth principles were concerned with the organisation of the future universities. These would be designed as centres for research and as residential communities. In the opinion of the commission this would encourage the recommended balance between the professions and the arts, plus it would help to guarantee a high standard of teaching. It was also the opinion of the Commission that providing research facilities in the future universities would develop the quality of knowledge on local problems and would contribute to the solution of local issues. In this respect, it would be possible to provide also an education properly related to local needs and of high quality.[37] The fifth and final principle set out by the Asquith Commission was that of

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[35] Great Britain, Colonial Office. *Report of the Commission on Higher Education in the Colonies*. 1945. p.13.

[36] Great Britain, Colonial Office. *Report of the Commission on Higher Education in West Africa*. 1945. p.12.

[37] Great Britain, Colonial Office. *Report of the Commission on Higher Education in the Colonies*. 1945. p.29.

autonomy. The commission saw this as an essential element if the political and academic goals mentioned above were to be attained.[38]

With the establishment of the IUC and its main guiding principles the Colonial Office had solved only half of the problem. It would take time for the new university colleges to build up a reputation. In the meantime, a mechanism had to be devised to insure that the degrees awarded by these institutions would enjoy international recognition. The Asquith Commission examined various possibilities in this respect. The most feasible option involved taking advantage of the system of external degrees already in existence in the University of London. However, the system as it was did not fulfil the needs established by the commission, for that reason the University of London was approached in March of 1944 to find a solution to this problem.[39] The University developed a modified version of the external degree system, the scheme of Special Relationship. The University Senate approved the new scheme in May 1945. The new universities would be created as University colleges. Their students would read for University of London degrees as external students within the framework of a special agreement of co-operation. This agreement would go further from the sole discussion of syllabi, rules and examinations. It would involve co-operation in the whole project of building up the academic experience of the colleges so they would eventually become independent universities.[40]

The creation of universities in the African continent was a first but important step towards the emergence of academic African History. With the opening of these institutions under the recommendations made by the Asquith Commission and the supervision of the Inter-University Council, the study of African societies could move from the margins to the centre of academic concerns for the first time. The African colleges would offer the natural spaces needed for this development and, in time, it would prove to be the major driving force for the emergence of new areas of research such as African History.

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[38] *Ibidem.* p. 34.

[39] Maxwell, I.C.M. *Op.cit.* 1980. p. 19.

[40] *Ibidem.*

The changes that prompted the creation of University colleges in Africa also produced changes in the situation for African studies in Great Britain. In 1945 a Committee was appointed to investigate the state of educational facilities in Britain for the study of Oriental, Slavonic, Eastern European and African studies. The Commission, which was chaired by Lord Scarbrough, published its report on April 1946. In the opinion of the authors of the report Britain's participation in the Second World War had uncovered the lack of knowledge Britain had of its colonies and other foreign territories.

"At the time of your appointment the second World War of this century was still being waged, in the struggle against German aggression, then within sight of its victorious conclusion, our forces had fought or were preparing to fight in many of the countries of Europe and the Middle East and Africa. It had been necessary to draw upon the production of almost all the allied and neutral countries of the world to nourish the many exacting campaigns in which our forces have been engaged. The mobilisation of all available assistance and support called for an understanding and knowledge of the peoples of the world which we were ill equipped to supply. The underdeveloped stage of our store of knowledge and the small number of our countrymen with any detailed acquaintance with the culture and economy of the peoples of Africa and the East stood in marked contrast with the intimacy of our contact with them in the joint struggle to save the world from the return of the dark ages. The demands to be made upon us by the final struggle against Japan were still unknown, but it was already apparent that an excessive preoccupation with Western affairs and civilizations would prove to be an obstacle to the effective mobilisation and deployment of military power in the Far East. Such were the circumstances which gave rise to this enquiry."[41]

It was not only the military circumstances that made it necessary to develop African and Asian studies. Changes in the policies of the Colonial Office (which were also behind the creation of university colleges in Africa) prompted the realisation that a new relationship with the dominions would also require a better knowledge of their culture and social and economic situation.[42]

Within this new frame of mind, the Scarbrough report set, as the main objective of its recommendations, "the building of an academic tradition comparable in

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[41] Great Britain. Foreign Office. *Report on the Interdepartmental Commission of Enquiry on Oriental, Slavonic, East European and African Studies.* 1947. p.5. This report will be referred as the Scarbrough Report.

[42] *Ibidem.* pp. 5-6.

quality and continuity with those of the major humanities and sciences".[43] The two most important recommendations were:

"i)Strong university departments should be developed relating to these countries and that in more general university department staff concerned with these countries should be strengthened.
ii)The probability that numbers of undergraduates is likely to remain relatively small should not hold up development."[44]

Other recommendations advised keeping a balance between linguistic and non-linguistic studies, and between classical and modern issues. It was also recommended that graduate research should be encouraged and that library resources should be improved. The importance of the first two recommendations, however, were to be crucial for the practical success of the project as a whole, this will be fully appreciated when we examine the impact the Scarbrough Report had on the development of SOAS.

The Scarbrough Report did prompt the British government to provide more resources to the study of Africa and Asia. However, it did not have a major impact in changing current approaches and perspectives in the study of African culture and societies. There were two main elements emphasised by the report in relation to African Studies. First, its dependence on the already achieved developments on colonial studies and second the role of anthropology as the major discipline to approach the study of Africa.

"Apart from generalised attention to colonial subjects, special significance attaches to the existence of active and well organised departments of anthropology. The reason is that Africa contains a large number of primitive peoples whose customs and institutions, in so far as they have been scientifically studied, provide a considerable proportion of the material of which modern anthropological research and teaching is founded... Moreover, it is true to say that of all the non-linguistic studies necessary for persons about to embark on careers in Africa, anthropology, in its widest implications, takes high, if not absolute priority."[45]

The kind of development that the Scarbrough report was expecting from its recommendations was more inclined to an expansion and consolidation of the

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[43] *Ibidem.* p. 69.
[44] *Ibidem.* p. 69-70.
[45] *Ibidem.* p. 143-44.

existing area of colonial studies as it existed then, rather than a radical change of approach to the study of Africa. Despite this limitation, the economic and institutional support it prompted provided the adequate institutional environment for academics to innovate and experiment with new views and approaches.

SOAS is an example of the impact of the Scarbrough Report. Its recommendations took SOAS into a short but important period of expansion. The economic support received by the school enabled different academic departments to enlarge their establishments and to create new areas of study. In 1947 the School envisaged a period of expansion that would result in an increase in the academic establishment from sixty-three posts in 1947 to two hundred and fifty-six in 1957.[46]

This expansion would be based on a series of grants offered by the Government (that would not be subject to the number of undergraduates in the School) and a number of Treasury Studentships to provide for the recruitment and training of new staff. The Scarbrough Report had contemplated that this financial scheme would last for a period of ten years; but it was only applied during the first five years. At the beginning of the second quinquennium the post-war financial crisis hit universities. It was decided by the University Grants Committee that the School would have to start competing for funds, as did other institutions of the University.

Despite these early setbacks, the School managed to sustain a moderate expansion during the following quinquennium. The developments achieved between 1947 and 1952, set the foundations for the expansion of a number of departments, among them, History. The creation of an African field within the History department was made possible thanks to the resources provided by the Scarbrough expansion, and to the vision of Cyril Philips, then head of department.

This renewed interest in African Studies was not an exclusively British phenomenon. The Government of the United States and other funding bodies

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[46] Phillips, C.H. *The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. 1917-1967.* p.43.

were also becoming more aware of the new political situation that was emerging toward the end of the Second World War, and were determined not to be left behind in the race to develop a sizeable academic tradition.

American interest on African History was prompted by a number of elements. Among the most important was the process of decolonisation that brought Africa to the centre of American political and academic interest. This combined with the strong economic position of the United States in the post-war period prompted the need for experts in the newly independent areas of the world. The increasing climate of tension between East and West, which was to culminate in the Cold War, was obviously an element behind the need to obtain detailed and competent knowledge of the new African countries. A second important element was the expansion of the University system during the 1960s, which gave departments the opportunities to introduce new areas of teaching and research. A third factor that was influencing the minds of Government and funding bodies, was the changing political and social situation of racial politics in the United States. The increasingly tense racial situation, which culminated on the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, produced a renewed interest on the past and culture of the African-American population and gave African studies a new sense of relevance in American society.[47]

Interest in African studies first came during the Second World War when Africa became increasingly important in American strategies and actions. The need for trained personnel gave rise to the establishment of crash programs such as the Army Specialist Training Program and the Army Civil Affairs Training Service. In the 1940s, the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) and the Social Sciences Research Council (SSRC) promoted a discussion on the creation of area programs that provided alternative options to those offered by the Government. In 1945-46 the ACLS and the SSRC appointed a joint committee, the World Areas Committee, which contributed important guidelines for the development of Area studies and was opposed to the approach adopted by the Army programs. These

[47] Newbury, D. "Africanist historical studies in the United States; metamorphosis or metastasis." Jewsiewicki, B. & D. Newbury (eds.) *African historiographies: what history for which Africa?* 1986. p.153.

guidelines were to become important for the final development of Area studies in American Universities.

The intervention of the World Areas Committee combined with the growing interest of private foundations encouraged the creation of Area studies programs in American universities. To do this, both private foundations and the Government tried to build on the experience of academics who had already shown interest on the study of Africa. Such was the case of Melville Herskovits from Northwestern University.

Since the 1930s, Herskovits had devoted his research and teaching to problems such as the nature of culture and cultural change. His main areas of interest were West Africa and the Americas. His contributions to African and African-American studies can be found at various levels. His anthropological work and the impact this had on the program he created will be analysed later in this work. Here I will concentrate on his efforts to set the institutional foundations to the study of Africa in the United States.

Herskovits first attempt to gain support for the study of African and African-American cultures came as a proposal to the Carnegie Corporation in 1947. He argued then for the establishment of a Program devoted to these issues.[48] The response of the Corporation, however, emphasised that any money granted should be devoted to the study of Africa only.[49] It is not surprising that Herskovits primary interest was the study of African-American cultures. Nor is it surprising the response he received from the Corporation. Domestically, the study of African-American issues might have appeared potentially subversive. In terms of world politics, its strategic value was very low.

African-American studies would have to wait, but in 1948 Herskovits finally did obtain a grant from the Carnegie Corporation for the creation of a Program of African Studies, the first one of this kind in the United States. It was designed as

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[48] M.J. Herskovits to Franklin B. Snyder. October 27, 1947. *Melville Herskovits Papers.* NUA.

[49] J.W. Gardner to M.J. Herskovits. December 22, 1947. *Melville Herskovits Papers.* NUA. For a brief discussion of this exchange see also Guyer, J.I. "Perspectives on the beginning." *PAS. News and Events.* 8, (3), 1998. p. 2,4.

an interdisciplinary program for the study of Africa and other programs that followed would imitate this pattern.

The second major foundation to show an interest in the development of Area studies was the Ford Foundation. In 1952 the Foundation supported a conference on Africa which was aimed to "explore the conditions existing in Africa, the present and proposed programs of governmental and non-governmental agencies there, and the needs and opportunities for further activities by private American voluntary agencies."[50] In the Conference on Africa -supported by the Ford Foundation and organised with the help of Herskovits- it was identified "the rapidly increasing significance of Africa in world affairs" as a major concern for the United States. It was also agreed that this country lacked the expertise to face and understand the changing position of Africa.[51] The main recommendation presented by this Conference was "to strengthen and develop centers of African research and teaching, including the development of library resources on Africa and fellowship programs in these centers".[52] The Conference made a number of specific recommendations aimed at achieving this general objective. These included: financial support for the existing Program of African Studies at Northwestern, financial support to develop a new African Studies Program on the East coast, and further financial support in a smaller scale to other universities which might show enough competence and interest in the area of African studies.[53]

The Ford Foundation commissioned a second report in June 1958. This time a committee was appointed to report on the current condition and future prospects of African Studies in the United States. The members of this committee were L. Gray Cowen, Carl G. Rosberg, Lloyd A. Fallers and Cornelius W. de Kiewiet. The final report of this committee was completed on August of 1958. It emphasised the importance of Africanist research in the formulation of Foreign Policy.

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[50] Carl B. Spaeth [Director of Division of Overseas Activities, Ford Foundation] to M.J. Herskovits. July 29, 1952. *Melville Herskovits Papers*. NUA.

[51] Ford Foundation Conference in Africa. "Findings and recommendations". Evanston, Illinois, August 18-23, 1952. p.3. *Melville Herskovits Papers*. NUA.

[52] *Ibidem*. pp. 6-7.

[53] *Ibidem*.

"If the issues before the United States and Africa were not so pressing we might well place almost exclusive emphasis upon the ordinary academic process as best means of achieving progress understanding contemporary Africa, for we have fundamental faith in this process. In present circumstances, however, we conclude that this process cannot fully meet the needs because it operates too slowly. In order to achieve early understanding we need an accelerated rate of research in the nature of contemporary African society and the directions of its development; we need a means of communicating the results of this research to the centers of discussion and formation of public policy; we need quickly to give the impression abroad (both in Africa and Europe) that the American concern with African problems is intelligent and well-informed."[54]

This emphasis on the role of Africanist research and foreign policy proved to be an important catalyst for the development of African studies on a larger scale. Although a late entrant, the American Government also chose to intervene in the process of developing Area studies in American universities.

The main Government contribution to the development of African studies in the United States was made through Title VI of the National Defense Education Act of 1958. During the next ten years it would provide substantial support to American institutions for the development of African studies in general and the study of African languages in particular.[55]

The American Government still needed to be convinced of the potential benefits to increasing or continuing its support for African Studies. In 1959, the Senate commissioned Northwestern University and its Program of African Studies with a project to examine American Foreign policy of the time.[56] One of the conclusions of the report that resulted from this investigation was that "private organizations... cannot longer provide the amounts needed to carry on the educational and research activities that are requested of us. Hence, substantial governmental contributions are essential if the historic continuity of our earlier

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[54] Report of the Committee on African Studies. Prepared for the Ford Foundation. August, 1958. p.17. *Program of African Studies Records.* NUA.

[55] Hadsel, F.L. "American scholarship on Africa, 1950-1970. Origins, influences, highlights." Conference presentation. African Studies Association Annual Conference.1989. p.7. Title VI funding for National Resource Centers was first introduced through the National Defense Education Act of 1958. In 1980 this funding became part of the National Education Act that incorporated elements of its predecessor. This funding has been very important in supporting language learning and fieldwork, two crucial elements in the development of African History.

[56] Minute March 4, 1959. Minutes of the Committee of the Program of African Studies. *Melville Herskovits Papers.* NUA.

contacts with Africa, and the resulting benefits from them, are to continue."[57] The report then continued to recommend the increase of economic support by the Government for research and educational exchange on and with the African continent.[58]

It is not hard to see the hand of Herskovits in this report. First of all, the emphasis put on "the historic continuity of our earlier contacts with Africa" is an obvious and suggestive reference to the role of African studies in a racially divided American society. It is likely though, that this reference was of little interest for policy makers who were, at that point in time, more worried about foreign policy and not with domestic issues.

By the beginning of the 1960s the panorama for American institutions wishing to venture into the area of African studies was much brighter. Not only private Foundations but also the American Government were ready to provide economic support; and universities, such as Northwestern,[59] were ready to profit from these advantages. The institutional scene was finally ready for the emergence of African studies and African History in the major areas of anglophone academic research, the United Kingdom and the United States. More importantly, Africans now also had the necessary institutional framework to develop research among their own communities.

Part 3.- The *Annales* school, Marxism and the transformation of History.

Ideas about Africa also went through an important process of change during the first half of the twentieth century. Two areas of ideological production played an important role in the emergence and consolidation of African History within the academic world. First, the substantial changes experienced in the area of historiography and the new parameters in the practice of history. Second, changes in the political and social environment in Britain, Africa and the United States.

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[57] Interdisciplinary Committee on African Studies. *United States Foreign Policy: Africa.* 1959. p.15.

[58] *Ibidem.*

[59] Other universities that opened early programs were Boston and UCLA. The absence of the most prestigious institutions such as Harvard and Yale should be noted.

Processes such as decolonisation and the Civil Rights Movement played a crucial role in the emergence of African History and also left an imprint on the development of the field.

From the times of Herodotus the writing of History has tried to define rules and objects for this activity. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that historical writing became a professional activity. It was mainly after the 1870s that historians tried to establish a firm foundation for the research and writing of historical knowledge. The most important of these attempts was that of Leopold von Ranke who put the critical analysis of documents at the core of historical research. As with other social scientists during this period, historians tried to establish History as a reliable form of knowledge. Inspired by the success in the natural sciences historians tried to create a "science of History." Thus, manuals were written, rules for critical research were established and standards for teaching and testing were set in force in universities.

Professional historians set rules for the research and writing of historical knowledge. However, this did not change their objectives and concerns. As in previous centuries, historical research continued to be heavily concerned with political issues. It focused on the activities of important political and intellectual figures and paid little attention to the common people. Research on the history of non-European peoples was a very small proportion of historians' work. Methodologically, historians looked for ways to find "historical truths." The way most historians followed was to critically examine documents. These were seen as containers of the truth about the events of the past. The work of the historian was to verify their validity and incorporate them in a comprehensive narrative.
With subtle differences in approach, both American and British historiography followed these general guidelines. In both cases the bulk of historical research was focused on Europe and the United States, and in both cases it relied heavily on written documents. During the first half of the twentieth century, and particularly as a result of both World War One and World War Two, this notion of historical practice would experience important changes. New contributions to the study of the history of Europe would bring these changes about.

An important revolution in the historical discipline was to come from France. The *Annales* school that emerged in France during the first half of the twentieth

century brought a number of innovations into History. The main concern of members of the *Annales* school was to produce historical works that reflected a wider variety of past human experience. They challenged the limited vision of history as documentation of the political past or as a mere transcription of what was said in the documents. Many were the specific contributions of this school, but their influence was strongly felt in three areas of the historical discipline. First, on the issue of sources, *Annalistes* were in favour of including new kind of sources in their investigations of the past. Documents were, in their opinion, important but not unique in their portrayal of past historical events and processes. The study of artistic objects, literature, music and even the geographical landscape could be used as sources of history. This would bring into the writing of history, new dimensions of the human experience. *Annalistes* also broke the strong divisions between disciplines. In an era in which social disciplines were moving towards growing specialisation, the *Annales* school sought to integrate the knowledge produced by many disciplines such as anthropology, demography and geography in the production of historical knowledge. By doing this, *Annalistes* woke historians to the complexity of social reality. They called for the realisation that any analysis of the latter, would require the collaboration of a number of disciplines. This contribution was significant not only for history, but also to the general development of social research in the twentieth century. Despite the fact that specialisation in the social disciplines has reached significant levels, this has happened with a growing tendency to try to integrate all these different kinds of knowledge. This explains, the increasing concern, in the second half of the twentieth century, with the notion of interdisciplinarity. A third area of influence of the *Annales* school affected the traditional objects of study of historical research. *Annalistes* such as Bloch and Febvre challenged the limited view of historians who were only interested in the study of a small social group, or just with the area of political events. They called for the study of society as a whole and by doing so they promoted the analysis of such society and contributed the development of a new notion of social history. Fernand Braudel took these notions further when he coined the notion of *histoire totale*, by which he meant a kind of history that could incorporate a large number of levels and aspects of human experience. He also broke current notions of geographical space and physical time. In his work on the history of the Mediterranean he proved that historical research did not have to be constrained by national boundaries, and that large geographical areas

which were linked by their historical experience could be studied as units of historical change. He also explored the notions that historical time could be different to our perceptions of physical time, and that notions of progress and civilisation would be relative to the different ways in which history developed in different areas of the world.

Marxism also proved to be an important innovative force within history in the second half of the nineteenth century. However, its main contributions to the transformation of the historical discipline had to wait until the twentieth century. Probably, the most important contribution was the radical questioning that Marxism presented to the very nature of history as it had been practised so far. Mudimbe captured the importance of this moment for African History when he said: "The centrality of history is thus remarkable in what Marxism expounds in African studies. In effect, the invention of an African History coincides with a critical evaluation of the history of the same. One also observes that the possibility of an African History seems linked in a relation of necessity to an European questioning of both what history is not and what it should be."[60] Marxism certainly brought this questioning to the writing and research in European History, and by doing so, it opened the doors of historical research to new areas that had previously been neglected.

The most influential exponent of Marxism in the anglophone academia was E.P. Thompson.[61] Like the *Annalistes*, he challenged the view that historical research was only concerned with the history of the ruling classes or with the political processes of powerful nations. In his study of the working classes and industrialisation, he brought the common people to the forefront of historical study. By doing so he contributed to our modern understanding of social history. His use of theoretical concepts and categories from Marxism proved the advantages of the use of this kind of tools in historical research. Thompson's work captured and articulated the discontent that was brewing against some of the

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[60] Mudimbe, V.Y. *The invention of Africa*. 1988. p. 177.

[61] The work of E.P. Thompson became very influential even when he did not have a university appointment.

rules established by the old historiography. For this reason it became so influential.

One cannot overlook the coincidence of ideas between Marxism and the *Annales* school. In the words of a famous Marxist historian:

"It was on the ground of economic and social history, which was of course the banner heading of the original *Annales*, that we met. The young Marxists in those days found that the only part of official history that made any kind of sense to them, or at least that they could use, was economic history, or economic and social history. It was therefore through this that the junction was made."[62]

This coincidence of interests was certainly not casual. It reflected the unhappiness of many historians about the strict divisions between history and other social disciplines and about the lack of imagination in the reading of sources.

The influence of these innovations was also felt in the United States, where the field of African-American History was about to enter a new era of development. Historians of Black America were no longer interested only in integrating the Black experience into American History. They were now emphasising the cultural, social and historical nature of this experience. The study of Africa, now perceived as the source of Black culture, acquired renewed importance.

The first impact African-American History had on African History, however, was not purely historiographical. The new perception of Africa was important to give further justification to the study of African History. However, scholars interested on African-American History developed their own interpretations of the African past; interpretations that generally were different to those produced by historians of Africa. During the 1960s this difference of opinions did not seem to affect the cordial relationship among both fields. However, the existing tensions emerged towards the end of the decade and had been present ever since.

Most of these changes in the field of history did not argue directly for the study of African History. However, they allowed new generations to explore and experiment with new areas of research and new methods. These changes in the

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[62] Hobsbawm, E. "British history and the *Annales*: A note." *On History*. 1997. p. 179.

practice of history did not occur in a vacuum. As happens in most cases, a much deeper change was taking place in the political and social relations between different social groups. Important for our purposes are the changes that were occurring in the relationship between Britain and its dominions. As we saw in the last section, notions of self-government, the process of decolonisation and the emergence of nationalism in Africa had a large impact in the redefinition of relationship between Britain and its colonies. Underlying these changes was a fundamental transformation in the perception of Africa. Africa could no longer be seen as the playground of European forces. African peoples were showing their intent and power to take their history into their own hands. On the verge of nationalist revolution, Africans were keen to recover the past they felt Europe had taken from them. In this sense, nationalism was more than a mere political force, it affected the ways in which Africa was perceived and it certainly had an important effect in the way its past was presented. This was also influential in the field of African-American History. The Black population of the United States was receptive to the discourse of liberation emerging from Africa. This new and strong Africa became an important symbol in the Civil Rights Movement. In the end, both processes, Nationalism and Independence, and the anti-racial struggle in the United States were united by notions of Panafricanism which were central to African-American approaches to African History.

Africans' claim for their own history finally found a fertile soil in the newly created institutions. However, historians were hardly ready to fulfil the need for African History. The changes that contributed to the creation of new institutional spaces were the result of political need and not of academic intervention. It was now the turn for historians to prove that African History was a viable field. The process to establish the foundations of the new field will be the subject of the following chapters.

CHAPTER II

The Pioneers.

Jan Vansina remembered the first years of African History in the following words:

"By the time academic African History arrived on the scene, the search for the history of tropical Africa involved small heterogeneous groups here and there, often working in isolation. Academic historians encompassed a general imperial group, a South African group and a few lonely historians such as John W. Blake, who was focusing on early European-African contacts. With the exception of Melville Herskovits and some of his students at Northwestern, anthropologists were no longer involved with this topic, and archaeologists were focusing on the earliest ages of humanity."[1]

This opinion describes some of the characteristics of the first years of African History in the academic world. The decade of the 1950s saw important developments in the field of African History. It was a period when historians had to find an identity for the academic study of the African past. This search started, as Vansina said, in relative isolation. Different groups were trying different approaches. However, towards the end of the decade, the community came together with a much clearer project.

The objectives of this project only became clear towards the end of the decade. In Great Britain, for example, the renewed interest in African Studies, was sparked by the process of decolonisation. Thus, the study of Africa was first seen as an appendage of colonial studies. By the end of the decade, however, the discipline of African History, very much encouraged by the independence of African nations, also broke free. It began a process to define itself separately from colonial studies. The steps taken in the 1950s were important for the new field because they set down some of the trends and practices that were to be followed in future years.

Historians in the 1950s were not completely sure of what they were doing when they explored the African past. They knew they were breaking new territory, but it was still within fuzzy boundaries of the so-called colonial history. Their uncertainty and caution stood in stark contrast with the fast pace at which change was happening at the institutional level. It was the creation of new universities in

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[1] Vansina, J. *Living with Africa.* 1994. p. 44.

Africa that prompted the participation of young historians who were to reflect on the connections between African and colonial history in the new political scene. One should try not to look at the changes of the 1950s on a teleological way. Historians and institutions in the 1950s were certainly testing new waters. The questions and problems formulated by the end of the decade were the result of experimentation and the political concerns of the time, rather than the culmination of a carefully defined project.

Part 1-. African History in universities.

The first opportunities for the emergence of African History appeared in the newly created spaces for African studies in Britain, Africa and the United States. These were the places where the ideas about what would become African History first developed. African History had its best chance in the recently created university colleges in Africa. In their quest to provide a high standard of education, the new institutions were required to establish History Departments and eventually to develop the study of African History.

The creation of a historiography of Africa became an important challenge for African colleges. From the point of view of the colleges, the main goal was to create a curriculum that included significant elements of African History. Making this possible required to address a much larger problem, that of the sources and resources available for the study of African History. In a paper with suggestions for the academic board in charge of Makerere College, Roland Oliver, then lecturer at the University of London, remarked:

"I said that the future emergence of textbooks worthy of university studies would depend greatly upon the speedy collection and preservation of the wealth of historical evidence that was still in an oral state and that was nowadays being passed sporadically from the older to the younger generation. I stressed that Africans outside higher education had already started both to read history and to write it and that a university department of history should keep pace with and try to guide this vibrant concern in the community at large."[2]

The challenge was even larger. There was certainly a need for the collection of oral evidence. However, there were other basic needs: archives needed to be organised, and libraries needed to be adequately equipped and prepared for the

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[2] Oliver, R. *In the Realms of Gold.* 1997. p. 112.

use of historians and other researchers. Without the establishment of this kind of infrastructure, African History would never develop.

Historians who joined the newly created departments at Ibadan and the Gold Coast were aware of these needs. K.O. Dike was a Nigerian who had completed a Ph.D. in History in University College, London. His thesis, and first book, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta* was published in 1956, and has been considered a pioneering work in the field. In addition to his work in the History Department at Ibadan -where he became head in 1956- he also concentrated his efforts in the collection of potential source materials for history. He was eventually commissioned to report on the preservation of National Archives, and since then devoted most of his time to the reorganisation of these repositories.[3] Much of the success of Ibadan in the production of early African History can be attributed to the pioneering work done by Dike in the establishment of the foundations of an infrastructure that could support the development of historical research in Africa.

The History Department in Makerere showed more modest achievements. It could be argued that the differing political situations in East and West Africa affected the speed at which the production and teaching of African History developed in each region.[4] West Africa was ahead in the training of African historians and had a more mature intellectual and nationalist tradition. Makerere, as I said, made some progress, but significant changes just occurred in the 1960s when Ogot went back to Kenya and with the establishment of the History Department in Dar es Salaam.

West Africa was going through a process of political change. Nationalism was at its strongest, and the intellectual environment was becoming more favourable to the introduction of African History. This was particularly true in the University College of the Gold Coast where members of the History Department started to establish the foundations for the study of the African past.

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[3] Ajayi, J.F.A. "African History at Ibadan." Kirk-Greene A.H.M. (ed.) *The Emergence of African History in British Universities; An autobiographical approach.* 1995. pp.93-94.

[4] Ingham, K. "Makerere and after." Kirk-Greene A.H.M. (ed.) *The Emergence of African History in British Universities. An autobiographical approach.* 1995. pp.113-123.

The University College of the Gold Coast was founded in 1948. Recruitment for qualified historians began almost immediately. The terms and conditions that were offered to these historians were attractive enough to bring in young scholars trying to start a career.[5] Such was the case of John Fage who joined the History Department in 1949. As many other historians of his generation, Fage's interest in Africa started with his participation in the Second World War. As a member of the R.A.F. he spent some time in Southern Rhodesia and then South Africa.[6] After the war Fage went back to England and to Cambridge where he completed a Ph.D. under Eric Walker. His first research project was concerned with the concession of self-government in Southern Rhodesia. Out in the job market, Fage decided to apply for a position in the recently founded University College of the Gold Coast, and was accepted.

The University College was then getting ready to introduce the History Honours degree. To do this, it was necessary to make some modifications to the London History Honours syllabus to adapt it to the needs of students in the Gold Coast. None of the first members of the department in the Gold Coast had a clear idea of those special needs or of how to fulfil them. The first members of the department were Berenice Hamilton, John Fage, J.R. Lander and G.E. Metcalfe. The interests of these members were varied. Hamilton and Lander were mainly interested in European History, and Metcalfe started his work on the compilation of documents related to British policy in West Africa.

However, given the fact that Fage was still in England when the negotiations started, the task of discussing these matters fell to him. Fage's recommendations suggested a small reduction in the amount of European and English History to make room for new courses. For the first year, Fage recommended a course called "Expansion of Europe in Africa," and for the second, a course which dealt with the relationship between Africa, Europe and the Americas during the slave trade era. The third year would eventually include a special course on an African topic,

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[5] Several historians commented on the fact that one of the factors why they decided to join the new University colleges was the salaries and allowances they were offered.

[6] Fage, J.D. "Legon and Birmingham." Kirk-Greene A.H.M. (ed.) *The Emergence of African History in British Universities. An autobiographical approach.* 1995. p. 57. The Second World War was probably the one element that brought many of the historians of the first generation in contact with Africa.

which initially was "The Unification of South Africa."[7] It is somehow ironic that the first subject recommended by Fage came from a field that was dominated by the so-called colonial history. This reflected Walker's influence, and shows that, at these early stages, Fage and his colleagues did not have a particularly clear idea of what kind of history was to be taught in the new university college. They were improvising as they went.

As a result, this first syllabus was still quite different from what we know as African History. It was the result of limitations that were understandable. None of the members of the staff had had much experience in the study of Africa and, above all, there was the need to ensure that the teaching of History in the Gold Coast fulfilled the standards of the University of London. Thus, the new syllabus was guided by two objectives:

"The general aim of this reviewed syllabus has been to give the students first and good grounding in English and European history.
a) Because the modern world will be unintelligible to them without such a grounding, and
b) Because the level of research and writing in these fields is such as to give some model for research and writing in e.g. African History."[8]

The notion that the content is separate from the ways in which history is written and researched is certainly debatable nowadays. However, one has to remember that in those days European History was considered to be the most developed area in the field of history. Not only were there plenty of sources available; there was also a long tradition of writing. It is not surprising then, that at the early stages, European History was seen as the model against which the development of African History would be measured. Therefore, if African History was to replace European History in the university curriculum, it was necessary to prove that the same levels of academic rigour could be achieved. The main challenge was to create the conditions for historians of Africa to develop their field up to the standards of European History.

In 1952 Dr. Hamilton resigned as Head of the History Department and Fage was appointed as acting head. In the following years, new members would join the

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[7] *Ibidem.*p.63-64.

[8] Draft Syllabuses in History. University College of the Gold Coast. *Academic Board Meetings.*1949-1950. UGBL.

department: D.S. Coombs, who had just been granted a Ph.D. for a thesis on "The British Attitudes, Public and Official, towards the Dutch Alliance during the war of the Spanish Succession;" M.A. Priestley who specialised on British trade in the Gold Coast; and R.G.S. Sprigge who worked on the history of political philosophy.

Despite the variety of interests among members of the department, there was an attempt, after 1952 to introduce more courses on African History rather than just courses on the History of Europe in Africa. Some members of the department started to get involved in research projects on the African field. Lander, who had so far been working on a biography of Edward IV, started a project for the recording of state histories in Ashanti; and Coombs became interested on Dutch West Africa.[9] Fage participated in several projects that show his concern to promote research and writing on the History of the Gold Coast and West Africa. The first result of this was the publication of two textbooks: *An Introduction to the history of West Africa*, which was published in 1955 and in 1958 *An Atlas of African History.* Fage was well aware of the limitations of these early works. In the Preface to his *Introduction* he said:

"The limitations of this little attempt to record and to interpret the history of West Africa over so long a period of time are manifest and obvious. The historian attempting to survey in perspective the history of, say, western Europe, can draw on a great accumulation of specialised studies by professional historical research workers; the would be historian of Africa has little comparable material at his disposal. It is not so many years ago that historians first began seriously to consider even the limited field presented by the history of European activities in West Africa; the indigenous history of West African peoples is only now becoming a field for detailed study by professional historians."[10]

All these limitations made it important for him to make a case for a level of reliance on the existing colonial historiography in order to develop the new field. After all, and despite its own deficiencies, it was all they had in hand. There was no doubt in his mind, however, that the new historiography would have to address the history of Africans themselves.

"It may no doubt be thought that in this book too little attention is given to the specifically African aspects of the story and too much to what, for want of a better word, may be termed its 'colonial' side. In answer I would plead, first, that our

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[9] University College of the Gold Coast. *Annual Report.* 1952-53. pp.13-14. University College of the Gold Coast. *Annual Report.* 1954-55. pp. 9-10.

[10] Fage, J. *An Introduction to the History of West Africa.* 1955. p. IX.

knowledge of the history of many West African peoples is as yet so indefinite or even incomplete that all too often speculation must unfortunately take the place of interpretation based on accurate and detailed information. On the other hand, not only do we often know much more about the externals of West African History, its links to North Africa and the Mediterranean, with Western Europe and the Americas, but in addition I would urge that a good knowledge of the influences which have reached West Africa from such places is quite essential for a proper understanding of the West Africa we see around us today."[11]

Fage certainly did not present the kind of African History that many would demand years later. However, he identified some of the questions that later historians would have to face. The most important of these were: How are we to understand external factors in the development of Africa? What should be their place in the historiography? And how could we strike a balance between external and internal factors in order to explain the complex changes experienced in the African past? These questions reveal already, that the notions of African agency, and an Africa-centred History would become more complex than they seemed at first sight.

Other projects were started in order to develop the new field. In 1952, Fage embarked in a project of recording Mamprussi and Dagomba drum histories and Lander started his recording of Ashanti histories. This project, in which there was collaboration from the department of Sociology,[12] was the first venture in the realms of oral traditions, and probably exposed Fage and other members to the problems in the use of this kind of materials. Another project which was not that successful, but which showed the kind of work the department was trying to promote, was the creation of the Gold Coast History Series. In Fage's words, this venture would have two purposes:

"(i)To present in a handy form collections of documents illustrating particular phases of the history of the Gold Coast and its peoples which will be of use and value to students in the Gold Coast and elsewhere.
(ii)To print unpublished material of historical interest concerning the Gold Coast..., or to publish new and annotated editions of classic works about the Gold Coast (e.g. Bosman or Bowditch) which are now relatively rare books. This sort of

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[11] *Ibidem.*

[12] It is worth noticing that the Sociology department took over the role of an Anthropology department that was never created due to political sensitivities. The head of the Sociology department, Dr. Busia, had established a School of African Studies since the creation of the University College. But it was closed in the 1950s. Research on African Studies was then taken over by the departments of Sociology, Archaeology and later by the History Department too.

publication should have a wider appeal that that in (i) above, but the works in question would be produced in just a 'scholarly' manner."[13]

Unfortunately, the Academic Board rejected the proposal arguing that it was too early to embark on an editorial project.[14] From these examples one can see the efforts to collect sources, expand research and create conditions to stimulate discussion. One can also see the reservations with which these projects were often received. These doubts did not only come from members of the administration of the college. Scepticism about the new field was widespread:

"...some of our African students and some African teachers in other departments, tended to think that it was more important to know about the history of great powers like the United States and the Soviet Union than about the outer provinces of the world civilisation in which they themselves lived. I can remember that when our students were first given a choice between taking two new courses in African History or of keeping on with the 'Expansion' course and one in English medieval History, the class split 50:50, with some of the ablest opting not to go the African way."[15]

This shows that the balance between the standards imposed from London and expected in the Gold Coast, and the introduction of African History was not easy to achieve. In 1952 standards were related to the kind of education students were likely to receive in a British university, which eventually would get them better jobs. The preservation of these standards, however, made it difficult to introduce new subjects. In 1955, the History Department reported that for the first time the University of London made it possible for candidates to take two courses in African History instead of one course of European activities in Africa and a course in Medieval History. Unfortunately, the report continued, just half of those students took that option. The cause for this was thought to be the lack of knowledge of French that was required from candidates. The opinion expressed in the report was that any Honours History student wishing to specialise on African History required a good knowledge of French, given the large amount of sources written in that language.[16]

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[13] Proposal for Gold Coast Historical Series. University College of the Gold Coast. *Academic Board Meetings.* 1952-53.UGBL.

[14] Publications Board Meeting. May 15, 1953. University College of the Gold Coast. *Academic Board Meetings.* 1952-53.UGBL.

[15] Fage, J.D. *Op. Cit.* 1995. p.p. 66-67.

[16] University College of the Gold Coast. *Annual Report* 1954-55. p.10.

In fact, candidates were required to pass a translation paper in order to be awarded an Honours degree. They were expected to translate passages from such languages as English, Latin, French, and Portuguese. The role of European languages in African education has been a contested area up to the present. It was probably natural to require a good proficiency in English from candidates expecting to acquire a degree from the University of London. The use of French was certainly important for any student wishing to specialise in African History. Thus, this was not a surprising or unreasonable requirement. What may seem striking to the modern reader is the fact that African languages did not figure highly in the priorities of the History Department or the University College. This was understandable at those times and shows, to some extent, the uncertainties of that early period about the direction and priorities of African History.

This uncertainty was also evident in the chronological span of the subjects related to African History. Between 1952 and 1959, the General and Honours syllabuses were dominated by European and English History. Subjects on West African History did increase. However, more important than its actual inclusion was its incursion in more ancient periods of history. In 1948-49 the only concessions to the study of Africa were "European Activities in Africa" and "The Atlantic World". These subjects only covered the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By 1955, there were more options but also a more important effort to define and divide African History in historical periods. One can see then, "The History of Africa from c.1485 to c. 1800," and also a course called "The History of Africa from 1800."[17] Finally in 1959, a course called "Ancient Ghana" was also introduced. In this same year, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Ewe, Fante, Twi, Ga, and Efik were included among the optional languages for History candidates.

These changes in the curriculum reflect the first stages of three interrelated processes that occurred between 1948 and 1959. First, the successful effort by members of the department to collect and interpret enough historical material to support new African History courses. Second, this allowed historians to challenge the assumption that African History was only an extension of colonial history. Finally, this revealed a change in the evaluation of standards that allowed for the new field to gain some credibility in Europe.

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[17] University College of the Gold Coast. *Regulations*. 1955. p.59.

The emergence and success of Nationalism in this period was a fourth process that was to guarantee the consolidation of the achievements mentioned above. Nationalism provided historians with the right political and social environment for the development of the field. It allowed institutions to secure resources and also presented an ideological framework that provided a number of questions for historians. The impact of Nationalism and Independence on African History was to be felt more strongly during the 1960s when the field flourished.

In 1959, Fage left Ghana and returned to England, where he accepted a position at SOAS. Many of his colleagues also eventually left Ghana. But the road for new historians to take their places had been prepared. In 1956 Isaac Tufuoh and A. Adu Boahen were awarded scholarships to continue their studies in England. They would both return in 1960 to take up their positions in the soon to be University College of Ghana.

In England, the establishment of African History was also evolving slowly. The School of Oriental and African Studies was at the forefront of these developments. SOAS, as it was previously explained, received many of the benefits of the Scarbrough recommendations. However, the 1950s were more than a mere period of expansion. It was also a period of transition within which the School had to redefine its role within the British system of higher education.

"The School since its foundation in 1916 has grown under two dominant influences, the scholarly, the Orientalist, and the political, the Imperialist. We are all aware that Orientalism in Europe has a long a brilliant tradition, in which a remarkable pioneering and profundity went together. It was however, this brilliance of individuals, exercising influence through research rather than teaching, that long obscured the fact that these studies in the universities were fitful and irregular in their effects and were isolated from the mainstream of university life. The incorporation of the School as a separate College probably exaggerated this tendency within the School, creating something of a mystique about our studies and shrouding the school in clouds of mystery through which many of our colleagues still peer at us with some uncertainty. The Imperialist tradition on its side fostered the development of the School as an Imperial training centre without full recognition of its academic obligations as a college of the University. Since the war these traditions have lost much of their force. On the one hand the Orientalist's scope has been still further restricted by the growing sophistication of academic studies and the Imperialist tradition has lost its dynamism as a result of the change in the political image of Britain from that of the imperious mother to that of the more austere sister of the Commonwealth and

United Nations. New justifications, new inspirations for African and Asian were and are called for...."[18]

One can perceive the changes in the image and purpose of the school in the composition of its student body. Student numbers were generally increased until 1946 when they reached 1028. Since then, however, they decreased to 569 in the academic year of 1956-57, when numbers started to slowly increase again. More significant than the total number of students was their distribution. Between 1942 and 1948 46% of the student body came from the Armed Forces or the Colonial and Foreign Services, 11% were missionaries, and just 8% were enrolled in Higher or First degrees. In contrast, in the period between 1948 and 1956 the percentage of students coming from the Armed Forces and the Colonial and Foreign Service went down to 29%, while students pursuing First and Higher degrees increased to 28%.[19] It is evident from the numbers and from the comments of Sir Cyril Philips that the School was trying to redefine its position towards the teaching and research of African and Asian studies. It is within this environment that African History was introduced in SOAS, greatly by the initiative of the same man who reflected on the transformation of the school so accurately, Sir Cyril Philips.

Cyril Philips had been Head of the History Department since 1946. In his hands fell the responsibility of implementing the developments required from the Scarbrough Commission. In 1957, he left his position as Head of Department to become director of the School. Philips was a historian of India. His first contact with Africa came from his involvement in a project from the Colonial Office to implement a program of mass education in East Africa. This took him to visit the East African territories where he became aware of the amount of historical materials available and their potential.

"In one sphere at least I have found myself on secure ground, quite at home, for in my travels I have discovered that each district headquarters, of which there are over 50 in Tanganyka, has for many years past had to maintain a history of the African tribes in its area. Most contain unique material contributed over the years by a succession of often dedicated officers. If we wish at the school in London to help create and teach a history of Africans (as distinct from Europeans in Africa), these materials would prove a revealing counterpart to whatever may in due

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[18] "Directors Review" by C. Philips. SOAS. *Report of the Governing Body, Statement of Accounts, and Departmental Reports.*1957/1958. pp.76-77.

[19] SOAS. *Report of the Governing Body, Statement of Accounts, and Departmental Reports.* 1942/43-1956/57.

course be discovered through the recording and elucidation of the oral history- poems, narrations, and songs- of the tribes. I have therefore arranged through the chief secretary to have these historical sections from all the districts typed and copied to our library in London."[20]

From this early vision one can see that Philips had already formed a clear idea of what African History was supposed to be. His experience as a historian of India made the distinction between African History and the history of Europeans in Africa more clear than it was for other historians, and he was probably more sensitive to the potential value of oral materials. His vision certainly had an impact on the development of African History at SOAS.

Back at SOAS, Philips became Head of the department and his plans for the introduction of African History were set in motion. He knew the Scarbrough Report had made funds available for this kind of venture, but it had made no special mention of African History in the way Philips was thinking about it. He had a hard time convincing the Board of Studies in History of the viability of such a subject. Despite the doubts, the Board finally accepted. In the 1947-48 session the department had the way clear to introduce a special subject in the field of Tropical African History.[21]

Once the Board had been convinced, Phillips needed to fill two posts in African History. The first was taken by John Fage in the History Department at Legon. The second went to a young graduate from Kings College, Cambridge, Roland Oliver. Oliver's first interest was not African History. His research on the Missionary influence in East Africa was a result of a wider interest on the expansion of Christianity. *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* was the title of his doctoral dissertation that was published 1952.

The Missionary Factor in East Africa fits neatly in the pattern followed by other works during this period. Its main concern was not the development of a historiography of Africa, but to analyse the impact and consequences of European intervention, missionary work in this case. Studies about missionaries were

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[20] Philips, C.H. *Beyond the Ivory Tower, the Autobiography of Sir Ciryl Philips.* 1995. pp. 144-45.

[21] *Ibidem.* pp.164-165.SOAS. *Report of the Governing Body, Statement of Accounts, and Departmental Reports.* 1947-48. p.73.

popular at the time, and work on missionary intervention would continue to be important in years to come, although with significant changes of approach.

One would expect that given his position at SOAS, Oliver's work would have been more directly related to the development of African historiography. However, his first ten years at SOAS were devoted to explore the field in collaboration with other historians working in Africa. This first book was certainly not a major breakthrough. One could say it was well received, but not because of its contributions to a new field of African History:

"The author is concerned with the facts, and the facts here, so fairly and adequately presented, speak for themselves."[22]

Oliver's work fulfilled all the expectations of historians of his time, even if Africa's historiography gained little in independence from its colonial counterpart. This does not mean, however, that Oliver was unaware of the questions and debates that surrounded the emergence of African History. He also knew that the task of building a reputation for African History required a cautious approach. It was a delicate process of trial and error in which most of the involved had little or none expertise in the new field.

Thus, Oliver's job at SOAS was not an easy one. The main challenge was to establish the foundations of a new area of studies within a well-established History Department. It has been seen how Sir Cyril Phillips already had some ideas of what needed to be done to establish these foundations, and he gave Oliver plenty of work to get started. During his first term at SOAS, Oliver did not have any teaching responsibilities. However he was expected to study an East African language, read the ethnographic literature relative to East Africa and to get ready for a trip to the area. During this trip, Oliver would have to examine local sources both written and oral.[23] Such a busy and varied schedule led him to get in touch with other members of the School who also had an interest in Africa. Those first contacts proved to be of great importance for Oliver's training as a historian of Africa, and also for the way in which the field developed during the next two decades.

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[22] Harries, L. "Review of *The Missionary Factor in East Africa.*" *Africa.* 25, (1). 1955. p. 109.
[23] Oliver, R. *In the Realms of Gold.* 1997. p. 58.

His study of the Swahili language put him in touch with Lawrence Hollingsworth and Malcolm Guthrie. Both men introduced Oliver to the complex net of languages in Africa and caused him to reflect on the role of languages in the study of the African past.[24] Diccon Huntigford from the Africa department was also an important influence in the early career of Oliver. Huntigford was lecturer in Nandi, a Kenyan language, but also had an interest in ethnography and favoured diffusionist theories. Oliver said: "...I feel sure it was he more than anyone else who helped me to see that if there was such a thing as an intertribal history of East Africa in precolonial times, the most likely place to find it would be in the so called interlacustrine region, comprising southern Uganda, north-western Tanganyka, and Rwanda-Urundi. Here there had been strong kingdoms, organised along similar lines and with dynastic traditions apparently extending over four or five centuries."[25] It is obvious here how the strong emphasis on centralised kingdoms and societies, which would become an important feature of early African historiography, was beginning to take shape. In these early contacts Oliver also became aware of the importance of other disciplines for the study of African History. In doing so, he was also inheriting problems and theories from disciplines such as Linguistics and Ethnography. Interdisciplinarity was an important feature of African historiography, and has remained central to the study of the African past.

Outside SOAS Oliver also had important contacts that influenced his views. One of the most important was with Keith Hancock from the Institute of Commonwealth Studies. Oliver was already convinced of the importance for historians of Africa to engage with other disciplines. By his contacts with Hancock and his seminar, he realised the importance of entering into a dialogue with other historians. Hancock was a recognised member of the academic community. In 1950, after Oliver came back from his trip to Africa, he was invited by Hancock to attend a recently inaugurated seminar on the history of tropical dependencies. Oliver's relationship with Hancock would be of great practical use. More important, however, was the opportunity that became available to Oliver through the Seminar. Here he was able to discuss his early ideas on the field of African History.

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[24] *Ibidem.* p. 59.

[25] *Ibidem.* p.59-60.

"...we taught ourselves enough to realise that a real, if still somewhat fuzzy, distinction could be drawn between the traditional interests of colonial history and the history of the African peoples during the colonial period."[26]

Not everybody however, was ready to give the new discipline a chance. Oliver's contacts with anthropologists proved to be less useful, despite the fact that they were the ones from which he expected more co-operation.[27] The relationship between anthropology and history will be later examined. However, it is important to point out now that not all anthropologists embraced the project of African History as enthusiastically as members of other disciplines did.

The successful experience in Hancock's seminar convinced Oliver of the need to organise a similar space for the discussion of problems related to the study of Africa's past. This initiative would eventually become the African History Seminar, one of the finest forums of discussion in the field. The creation of this seminar was also possible due to the addition of new members to the department. R.A. Hamilton, who was to cover East Africa, and D.G. Jones to cover West Africa, joined the department in 1952.

Oliver's first contact with a wide variety of disciplines was reflected in the seminar, something that was facilitated by the size and structure of SOAS itself. Among the early assistants to the seminar were Diccon Huntigford, Anthony Arkell who had some archaeological interests, and Father A.M. Jones, ex-missionary, linguist and musicologist.[28]

In contrast with Hancock's seminar, which was concerned with African territories as colonial dependencies, the SOAS seminar tried to look at Africa's precolonial past. The papers presented were mainly related to the search and use of new sources. Discussions about oral sources, archaeology and linguistic evidence were a common feature. Some historical problems also started to emerge as important, such as the Bantu origins and migrations, and the origins and nature of kingship.

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[26] *Ibidem.* p.140.
[27] *Ibidem.* p.141-42.
[28] *Ibidem.* p. 141.

By 1952, Oliver and his colleagues felt it was time to go beyond the SOAS seminar. Given the connections between the University of London and the History Department at Legon, Oliver had renewed his contacts with John Fage. As has been shown, both historians were facing similar problems coming to terms with a notion of African History. They also knew that there were others in the same position. Thus, they agreed to organise a conference on African History and archaeology. Their main objective was to provide a forum in which teachers of African History in the African colleges could meet[29] and discuss issues such as: the use of new kind of sources, the exploration of methodological options, and other matters referred to the general definition of the field.

These problems were in the minds of the historians who attended the first conference in African History and Archaeology in the summer of 1953. The conference was mainly organised by Roland Oliver and was attended by a small number of historians and members of other disciplines interested in the new subject. The main issues discussed in the conference reflected the work developed in the seminar, which had been heavily centred on oral traditions, archaeology and linguistics, and gave special attention to Africa's precolonial past.

"The School of Oriental and African Studies in London was an obvious centre where such work [collection of historical traditions and interpretation] could be organised. With its interest in language, law, anthropology, archaeology and history, with its parallel concern with the peoples of Islam, it was a relatively simple matter to bring into being an African History seminar for this purpose. Out of the seminar the conference grew...Its ultimate aim has been to add to studies of European discovery, exploration, administration and colonisation of Negro Africa, some coherent historical account of the peoples found there, so deepening our understanding of this latest period of African History, and bringing to historical studies material which developing education in Africa increasingly demands."[30]

A general look through the papers presented at the conference shows the strong emphasis given to the problems of oral traditions and archaeological evidence. Most of the work done up to this point consisted of locating those traditions and evaluating its potential historical value. Little was done in terms of actually analysing those traditions or presenting them as part of a wider historical interpretation. There was relatively little discussion on the questions that were to

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[29] *Ibidem.* p. 142.

[30] Phillips, C.H. "Foreword" in Hamilton, R.A.(ed.) *History and Archaeology in Africa.* 1955.p. 7.

be addressed. It is evident, however, that kinship and the cultural origins of African peoples figured at the top of the list. An example of this is Oliver's remarks in the conference:

"The main concern of the historical period is the penetration of the ancient Bantu world by sections of the peoples living in the north and east of it: Arabs, Persians, and Indonesians from across the sea, Hamites from the north and north-east, Nilo-Hamites and Nilotes from the north, and Sudanic peoples from the north-west.
The deployment of the original Bantu-speakers over Africa south of the equator was a movement far greater and far slower than anything that has happened within historical times. Both the diffusion of the original form of Bantu speech into the hundreds of separate languages found to-day, and the completeness of their distribution over Africa south of the equator, seem convincing evidence that the original Bantu speakers, though doubtless not the earliest inhabitants, were, in general, the people who cut down the primeval forest and practised agriculture, in a movement far weightier in numbers and more extended in time than the earlier hunting cultures. Thus as a background to the study of oral traditions of East Africa, there is an ancient Bantu world, more homogeneous than the Bantu world of to-day: in physical characteristics more universally Negroid, in metaphysical beliefs more universally animistic, in kinship more universally matrilineal and matrilocal, in social organisation more universally patriarchal and without the political and dynastic structure which to-day distinguishes some of the Bantu-speakers."[31]

This strong concern with the cultural origins of African peoples would have an important impact on the way in which African History would be studied in the future. From this point on, there was a need for a distinction between what was "African" and what was "external" to Africa. The same kind of discussion would be eventually moved into the study of the colonial period, and would become an important point of contention as Nationalism became a factor in the writing of African History. The problem of Bantu origins also reveals the strong links historians of Africa had with other disciplines such as archaeology and linguistics. The term "Bantu" had strong linguistic implications and the general theory of a homogeneous cultural group migrating from north to south was a strong reminder of diffusionist ideas then popular among archaeologists and linguists.

Defining the methods and main problems that historians were to address, was not, however, the main achievement of the conference. The papers discussed only show some glimpses of issues that would become central to the internal development of the field. Practical obstacles seemed more pressing at that point.

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[31] Oliver, R.A. "Oral tradition. East Africa." In Hamilton, R.A. (ed.) *History and Archaeology in Africa.* 1955.p. 15.

The final resolutions of the Conference are proof of this. The general conclusion seemed to be that, for African History to become an active field of historical research, more efforts needed to be done to preserve and organise potential sources. Traditions needed to be collected in a professional way, monuments needed to be located, excavated and preserved, and archives were to be properly organised.[32] The issues discussed at the First Conference in History and Archaeology in Africa reflect the limitations faced by the first generation of historians interested in Africa. This conference showed that at the basis of any attempt to produce African History there was a pressing need for a body of reliable evidence. In this respect, this first conference was an accurate reflection of the state of the discipline at that point in time.

The most important impact the first conference had was the creation of a sense of community. For the first time, scholars interested in the African past were able to discuss their concerns within an academic forum. More importantly, they were able to collectively address specific problems and propose solutions. Despite the limitations of their conclusions, there is no doubt that the attendants to the conference found in it the sense of community needed to put an academic project in motion.

After the conference, Oliver and his colleagues went back to their research work at SOAS. A new challenge was waiting for them. The first research students were already arriving. With them came the possibility to ensure the continuity of the community that was beginning to take shape. In 1951, John Gray joined the department as the first graduate student. During the 1950s others would follow: John Flint, Ruth Slade, Marie de Kiewiet, and the first African students, Ade Aderibigbe from Nigeria and Adu Boahen from the Gold Coast. In addition to this, Oliver was also left in charge of Hancock's Imperial History Seminar. This allowed him to establish closer contacts with figures such as Jacob Ade Ajayi, Emanuel Ayandele, Christopher Ifemesia, Ibaro Ikime and Takuna Tamuno. The responsibility of Hancock's seminar also gave Oliver the opportunity to expand the concerns of his own seminar. It soon became a space where teachers interested in the history of Africa could go for training and discussion.[33]

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[32] Phillips, C.H. *Op.cit.* 1955. p. 8-9.

[33] Oliver, R.A. *Op.cit.* 1997. p. 147.

The majority of the students who passed through SOAS during the 1950s eventually made important contributions to the development of the field. However, the training of these students was not an easy task and reveals the difficulties of putting theory and practice together. As Oliver said:

"Our early research students were feeling their way into the subject, much as I had done. We had no funds with which to send them to Africa, and their three-year grants did not allow them enough time to learn and use an African language. They were looking for topics that could be opened from sources in Europe."[34]

Given these limitations, Oliver also decided to conduct his work into British archives, to familiarise himself with potential sources for his students. The result of this was his second book *Sir Harry Johnston and the Scramble for Africa* published in 1957.

One can easily see the practical obstacles for the development of the type of work that Oliver had been exploring. Despite the efforts to promote and explore the use of oral sources, archaeological and linguistic evidence, and the general study of the precolonial period, most of the research produced by graduate students did not go further back than the eighteenth century. It was clear that the relative freedom which Oliver and his colleagues had enjoyed in terms of their research could not easily be extended to their teaching. The work of students had to go through the evaluation of a wider community of historians, which was still sceptical about the validity of a field such as African History. Oliver was aware of this state of affairs, and decided to take the process of introducing the new area one step at the time.[35]

Towards the end of the decade (1957), the Second Conference in African History and Archaeology was organised. As had been the case at the first conference, this one was an accurate portrait of the state of the discipline almost ten years after its formal introduction into the academic world. More than a hundred individuals attended. Most of them were from Anglophone colleges in Africa and British

[34] *Ibidem.* p. 148.
[35] *Ibidem.*

institutions. There was also a smaller number of attendants from France and Belgium and a rather small number from the United States.[36]

This second conference was not only larger in numbers. It also had an extended chronological framework for the discussion. It was divided between Pre-nineteenth century and Nineteenth century.

"The general outline of the precolonial history of Africa presented in the report strikes me today as amazingly familiar. Here was a picture that was to be standardized for at least a generation- but only for Tropical Africa, for no paper dealt with Northern Africa or South Africa. Despite the definition of "Africa" in the doctrine of the school, the historiographies of these areas were not yet affiliated with 'African History'."[37]

The second SOAS conference marked an important moment in the history of the discipline. For the first time historians openly addressed the question of what was African History and what it should be. They attempted to define areas of study in the African past that could reveal the historical nature of the African experience. Moreover, the tried to establish that African History was more than a mere appendage of colonial history This was an ambitious agenda. It produced some important agreements that portrayed the study of African History not only as viable but also as necessary.

"There was an exceptionally lively session on the teaching of African History, in which everyone, but especially the teachers from the African university colleges, insisted that, whether one was dealing with the evidence from archaeology or oral tradition or written documents, African History must from now on be Africa centred. Doctoral students must be steered away from topics concerned mainly with European activities or the policies of the colonial powers. Everything that had been done by colonial historians must be rethought in the light of the new criteria. Everything still to be done must be relevant to the African consumer. Documentary research must be directed to local as well as metropolitan archives.

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[36] *Ibidem.* p.165-166. At these early stages, the participation of Francophone scholars was of great importance. These had produced, so far, a large amount of works on the African past. The reasons why the systematic study of African History was delayed in France was probably due to lack of institutional backing.

[37] Vansina, J. *Living with Africa.* 1994. p. 52. The integration of North Africa and South Africa as parts of African History continues to be a contentious issue. Although there have been a number of ideological reasons for this, the historical development of these regions in itself poses its own problems. This does not mean that it should not or that it cannot be done. And certainly, creative and innovative approaches are needed to encourage new ways of thinking about this problem. Despite the deficiencies in our understanding of North Africa and South Africa as integral parts of the African experience, it should be said that SOAS did significant attempts to bridge this gap through the work of Michael Brett and later Shula Marks.

Literary evidence, so largely directed by outsiders, must be tested from eyewitnesses or oral tradition. Most new research must be undertaken at least partially in African countries, and historians must, as their numbers grew, pay as much attention to evidence in African languages as anthropologists and sociologists had long been in the habit of doing."[38]

Two aspects have to be highlighted from this approach. First, the notion of an Africa-centred historiography and second the idea of relevance. For historians of the time, the two concepts were closely linked. A history that was concerned with the lives of Africans was bound to be relevant to the African people. These ideas became central for the definition of African History. They provided a clear-cut distinction between African History and colonial historiography, a distinction that had proven to be elusive up to that point.

The agreements reached at the second conference were certainly an important step forward from the achievements of the first conference. There was a continuation of the concerns about precolonial history and historical evidence. But in addition to this, there was also a much clearer attempt to assert the identity of African History in relation to colonial history. The new field was more than just the study of precolonial Africa; it also demanded a complete re-evaluation of the proximate colonial present. Two things had changed between 1953 and 1957. First, there was an increase in the number of people going into the professional study of the African past, both in Europe and in Africa. History Departments in the African colleges were slowly producing their first results, and the growing demand for the subject promised to increase the numbers of professional historians who would enter the new field. In 1957, the numbers were still low compared with those of the 1960s. However there were enough historians to sustain an important amount of empirical research that was the foundation of any further development in the field. This increase in numbers was such that by the end of the decade, the Rockefeller Foundation agreed to fund the first journal specialising in African History. The *Journal of African History* was first launched in 1960.

The second factor was the strengthening of Nationalism in Africa, and the imminence of independence. Nationalism was to permeate all areas of intellectual

[38] Oliver, R. *Op.cit.* 1997. p.168.

production, and History did not escape its impact. As a matter of fact, the ambiguity of notions such as "Africa-centred history," and "relevance" would acquire a more specific meaning within the context of Nationalism. It was through this influence that the quest to "decolonise" African History clearly emerged.

Thus, between 1953 and 1957 one can see a double process by which the field of African History cut its links with colonial studies. First, there was a modest but significant increase in the research. Second, one can see the development of an ideological framework that allowed its definition as an independent field of study.

Thus, part of the success of historians of Africa so far was due to changes in Africa itself. In 1957 Oliver embarked on a second trip to Africa where he was able to witness the rapid pace of changes taking place. He witnessed the enormous achievements of the West African colleges, both the Gold Coast and Ibadan. He made a stop in Central Africa where he met a young anthropologist, Jan Vansina, who was opening new ground in the interpretation of oral traditions for historical use. Finally, he was able to contrast these experiences with what he saw in South Africa where change seemed to be happening at a much slower pace.

After 1957 a few things would change in the position of African History at SOAS. In the academic year of 1957-58, just after the conference, the Senate of the University decided to establish a Readership in the History of Africa to which Oliver was appointed. Although a modest step, this was a vote of confidence to the field.

The people involved were also changing. Among the staff, Robert Hamilton left SOAS and was eventually replaced by John Fage in 1959. Among the students, some had graduated or were about to graduate, such as Richard Gray, Adu Boahen and John Flint, all of whom took positions in African colleges. New students arrived, and among the new arrivals it is important to make special mention of Allan Ogot, the first East African student. Ogot was interested in working on the migration and settlement of the Luo people. His intentions, however, were to work entirely with oral traditions. The fact that Oliver was ready to support this project is proof of the new climate of confidence in the field. It was time to take the study of African History one step forward.

SOAS' contribution to African History during this period was made in two main areas. First, it was a centre in which important historians were trained. Second, it provided the spaces for historians of several parts of the world to discuss and refine their ideas for the development of African History.

While Ibadan, Legon and SOAS were making progress in their introduction of African History, American universities were facing a similar process. The development of African History in the African colleges and SOAS was closely related to the demands from secondary and higher education in Africa. The people and the institutions that were in charge of the development of the field had African History as their main objective. In the case of the American universities, the situation was slightly different. African History was only a part within the wider notion of African Studies. Within this wider framework, history was at a disadvantage compared with other disciplines such as anthropology. However, by the end of the decade things started to look better for historians.

The Report of the Committee on African Studies presented to the Ford Foundation in 1958 said this about history:

"In the field of history the need clearly exists for scholars with a new approach and focus. The traditional historical approach to history is diplomatic (The Partition of Africa), colonial (the expansion of Europe) and quite rigidly archival. For better or for worse we can expect a certain degree of chauvinism in future historical writing by patriotic Africans. This may be a necessary episode in the development of research and writing of African History, so to speak, from within Africa, calling on great variety of ethnic, linguistic, cultural and other factors insufficiently exploited in traditional methods and approaches. This is a most appropriate point to emphasize once again the wisdom of encouraging the practice of interdisciplinary training. It is inconceivable that a theoretically sound new historiography could be developed by scholars without a genuine grounding at least in anthropology and the important variant of social anthropology."[39]

Anthropologists were very important in raising the profile of African History in American universities. This was particularly the case in Northwestern. In the previous section we saw how Herskovits was opening new ground with the creation of an African Studies Program in the University of Northwestern. There, anthropology was certainly leading the way. This was only natural given that

[39] Report of the Committee on African Studies. Prepared for the Ford Foundation. August, 1958. *Program of African Studies Records*. p.10. NUA.

Herskovits was the main influence on the program and because Anthropology was the dominant field for the study of Africa.

Unlike many anthropologists of his time, Herskovits was aware of the importance of History for the understanding of African cultures. As a student of Franz Boas,[40] Herskovits was more receptive to the importance of historical change than British structural-functionalists.

"Cultural anthropology, it can be said, is holistic, in that it is concerned with all aspects of human belief and behavior; historical, in it stress the factor of time as relevant to an understanding of human experience; and humanistic, in that its point of reference includes the individual who shapes his institutions even as he is being shaped by them. Social anthropology in contrast, is specialized, in that it concentrates on the sociological aspects of group life; synchronic, since its aim is the analysis of relationships within a given group on a single time plane; and structural, in that it is primarily concerned with institutional arrangements, and tends to disregard or blur factors that lead to alternative modes of behavior, and give to any social system a degree of variation that its table of organization fails to indicate."[41]

Herskovits devoted his career to the study of the cultural continuities between West Africa and African-American communities, what he called "Africanisms". His views were presented in the book *The Myth of the Negro Past*, which was published in 1941. The main purpose of this work was to provide scientific evidence that would contribute to combat racism and improve race relations. In doing so, he pointed to problems that were at the core of the development of African History.

"That the scientific study of the Negro and attempts to meliorate the interracial situation in the United States have been handicapped by a failure to consider certain functioning aspects of Negro life has become increasingly apparent as this

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[40] American anthropology during the first half of the XXth century was dominated by the figure of Franz Boas. The main concern of this school was culture and cultural change. In their view, historical processes such as migration and conquest, played an important role in cultural transformation.

[41] Herskovits, M.J. "The Ahistorical approach to Africanamerican studies, a critique" in Herskovits, F.S. (ed.) *The New World Negro*. 1966. p. 129. In a draft to this article Herskovits presented some ideas about the role of history in Anthropology: "...since the flow of time is an ever present factor in human experience, then even when this fac [sic] or cannot [sic] be substituted by recourse to the written record, the data must be handled with full realization of the role played by the past in shaping the observable present -- that is, with a sense of historicity. This is why, in the roster of academic disciplines anthropology must be classified as an [sic] historical science, like astronomy or geology, since in their analyses, too, the factor of time constitutes a critical component in determining the nature and forms of the phenomena they study." Herskovits, M.J. Draft article: "The ahistorical approach to Afro American studies: a critique". p.2. *Melville Herskovits Papers*. NUA.

investigation has gone on. Problems in Negro research attacked without an assessment of historic depth, and willingness to regard the historical past of an entire people as the equivalent of its written history, can clearly be seen to have made for confusion and error in interpretation, and misdirect judgement in evaluating practical ends."[42]

It seems clear that, for Herskovits, the study of the African past had more than a mere intrinsic value. It had an important contribution to make to African-American studies and history and, by extension, to the improvement of race relations in the United States. Herskovits' crusade for a more historical approach to African-American studies was an argument for the development of African History. By putting it forward, Herskovits was defining a new sense of relevance for the study of the African past in the United States.

In contrast with Herskovits' interest on the development of African History, the introduction of the field in Northwestern University was a rather slow process. The role of the Program of African Studies was to co-ordinate staff and students who belonged to individual departments. The Program itself did not hire historians or sociologists. It was up to each department to decide if they would hire a specialist in Africa. The History Department at Northwestern was relatively small. The main fields of concentration during the 1940s were American civilisation, American and English Constitutional development, Hispanic-American civilisation, English civilisation and European civilisation.[43]

When the Program of African Studies was introduced the History Department did not appoint a historian of Africa. However, one of its members, Franklin D. Scott, was chosen to represent the department in the interdepartmental committee. He was in charge of teaching courses that could include some African content. These were courses in European history in which an African element was introduced. For example, the first entry of the Program in the *Announcement of Courses in the Graduate School* in the 1953-54 academic year advertised under History the subject: "Expansion of Europe" which devoted one quarter to the expansion of Europe in Africa.[44]

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[42] Herskovits, M.J. *The myth of the Negro past.* 1941. p. XIII.

[43] NU. *Bulletin. Announcement of Courses in the College of Liberal Arts.* 1945-46.p. 81-82.

[44] NU. *Announcement of Courses in the Graduate School.* 1953-54. p.130-31.

Franklin D. Scott was not a historian of Africa, not even a historian of Imperialism. He held a Ph.D. in Social Sciences from the University of Chicago and a Ph.D. on European History from Harvard. He joined Northwestern University in 1935 and reached the rank of Professor in 1943. He was appointed Professor Emeritus in 1969, and, after retiring from Northwestern he went to work on the Nordic Collections at the Honnold Library of Pomona College.[45] By the time Scott was charged with introducing an African element to the Northwestern syllabus, he was already a consolidated historian of Scandinavia. He was in a very different position from that of Oliver at SOAS or Fage in the Gold Coast. He was not asked to develop a field of African History, neither was he at a point in his career in which such a thing would interest him. Thus, despite the interest he might have had, Scott's intervention was nothing but a temporary patch that had to suffice until the History Department was in a better position to accept a historian of Africa.

In the meantime, Herskovits made many attempts to promote the study of African History at Northwestern. His first attempt was to do this through an interdepartmental faculty seminar. In a letter to Dr. D.H. Rudin, Herskovits explained this attempt:

"We are trying both to carry further the investigations that have been the center of interest of this department for many years, and also to extend activity in the Africanist field to other departments and schools of the University.
As a step in achieving this end, we have established a Faculty Seminar, comprising people from ten departments or schools of the University. We are inviting people form various disciplines, elsewhere in this country who have done work in the Africanist field to meet with this group, an give them an over-all view of the African scene as regards problems and methods arising in their particular disciplines. It is our hope that out of this background will develop an interest on part of members which lead them to institute courses in history, economics, political structures, and the like, of Africa, or educational, legal or other phases of African life so that we will eventually have a fairly well-rounded program to support the special work in Africanist studies that a given student may wish to pursue in the course of taking his degree in one of the departments."[46]

Dr. D.H. Rudin had completed a doctoral study of German administration in the Cameroons. His main interests were European diplomacy and Imperialism, and

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[45] "Franklin D. Scott. Inventory." *Franklin D. Scott Papers*. NUA.

[46] M.J. Herskovits to Dr. H.R. Rudin [Department of History, University of Yale]. January 13, 1949. *Melville Herskovits Papers*. NUA.

considered the study of exploration and partition of Africa a central part of European history. Herskovits was interested in someone who could orient members of the seminar about the current state of knowledge, methods and problems in the field of African History. In that respect, Rudin seemed like the perfect candidate, since he certainly represented the state of affairs in the United States.

Towards the end of the 1950s two courses in African History were introduced; The History of West Africa and Seminar in African History. This, however was not a permanent provision. K.O. Dike, who was visiting lecturer during the 1957-58 academic year, taught the courses. From this year on, the department relied on visiting lecturers to offer courses on African History. A full time historian was not hired until the end of the 1960s.

The slowness of the History Department to appoint a full time historian of Africa can be attributed to two factors. First, its relatively small size. Franklin wrote about the difficulties in the department during the 1940s. In his view, the department was "understaffed and underpaid".[47] The important expansion in higher education did not begin to have an effect until the late 1950s. Thus, one can assume that, during earlier times, the situation was not favourable for the introduction of new fields of concentration.

The slow pace at which a demand for African History was building up also justified the lack of interest from the department. This also had an effect on the speed at which historians trained in the United States became available. When Philip Curtin, left Swarthmore College for Wisconsin, the Head of the department at Swarthmore asked Herskovits to recommend a suitable candidate to replace him. This, as Herskovits, explained, was quite difficult at the time:

"The difficulty is that Curtin is a pioneer, and that the combination of interests and abilities he had developed have not had time to exert their influence in the shaping of work of others. We see the slowness of that process here --with seven years of our Program of African Studies behind us, this year, for the first time, we

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[47] Scott, F.D. "Some reminiscences of the Northwestern History Department in the years 1935-1942."in *Franklin D. Scott Papers*. NUA.

have an appreciable number of applications -six- for scholarships in History under the program."[48]

Thus, one can see the difficulties facing Herskovits in introducing African History into his program. Fortunately, student demand would start to increase towards the end of the 1950s and during the 1960s. This turned history into the second most popular discipline within the framework of African studies.

While Northwestern struggled to introduce the study of African History, the University of Wisconsin in Madison was making the first step towards becoming one of the major centres in the development of the field. Unlike the History Department at Northwestern, the department at Wisconsin was one of the largest and most important in the country. Wisconsin did not have a Program of African Studies, nor had it shown any particular interest in African History. However, that was about to change. In 1956, the Department of History hired Phillip Curtin to substitute Paul Knaplund.

Since his participation in World War Two, Curtin developed an interest in non-European history. This evolved into an interest in African History. However, there was no place for him to pursue this concern because the subject was not taught in the United States. So he decided to turn to the study of the British Empire and the impact of African culture in the New World.[49]

Curtin regarded the History Department at Madison as conservative. At the time of his arrival they were trying to replace Paul Knaplund, their man in Imperial history. They were also trying to reduce the amount of non-western history. They had recently lost their specialist in Latin America, and were now looking for somebody who could teach both Imperial and Latin American history.[50] According to Curtin's recollections, Knaplund's retirement occurred in a climate of struggle within the department. It happened shortly after he had left the chairmanship due to pressure from younger members. Following this, there was resistance to the idea of allowing him to appoint his own successor.

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[48] M.J. Herskovits to Mary Albertson [History Department, Swarthmore College]. March 19, 1956. *Melville Herskovits Papers*. NUA.

[49] Oral History Project. Transcript of Interview with Philip D. Curtin. 8/ 5/ 1975. p.2-3. UWMA. Interview with Philip Curtin. November 13, 1999.

[50] Interview with P. Curtin. November 13, 1999.

"The decision of the department, as I understand it, was that they would get rid of two problems at once. They would appoint somebody who wasn't Paul's graduate and at the same time fill in the Latin American gap by appointing somebody who could teach both Latin American and British Empire history."[51]

If the trend in the department was to reduce the amount of non-European history, with Curtin they were up for a surprise. Curtin's interest in Africa took him to visit the continent in 1955. During this visit he met John Fage and through him he also learned about the work being done at SOAS.[52]

With these experiences on board, Curtin assumed his position in Madison. He did not wait long to introduce his ideas. Shortly after his arrival he moved for the introduction of a course called "History of Africa. European Penetration of Africa South of the Sahara and the inter-action of European and African Cultures".[53] He also suggested that John Fage be invited as Professor of Commonwealth History and took advantage of his presence to offer the first seminar in African History in Wisconsin and one of the first in the United States.[54]

Having taken these first steps, Curtin would end the decade with the creation of the Program in Comparative Tropical History (PCTH). This would be an important step in the consolidation of the position of African History in the History Department. Comparative Tropical History was not only the result of Curtin's interest on African History. At the beginning, there was little support from the department. The element that made a difference was the encouragement he received from senior members of the administration such as Fred Harrington. Harrington was a member of the History Department, and was also the Vice-President of the University. It was on his advice that Curtin contacted the Ford and Carnegie Foundations in search of economic support for the new program.

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[51] Oral History Project. Transcript of Interview with Philip D. Curtin. University of Wisconsin, 8/ 5/ 1975. p. 1. UWMA.

[52] Interview with P. Curtin. November 13, 1999.

[53] Minute October 15, 1956. *History Department. Minutes of the Executive Committee.* UWMA.

[54] Oral History Project. Transcript of Interview with Philip D. Curtin. 8/ 5/ 1975. p.3. UWMA. Interview with P. Curtin. November 13, 1999.

The Carnegie Foundation agreed to the proposals and the program was introduced in the fall of 1959.[55]

Also towards the end of the decade Curtin got in touch with other scholars in the university who were interested in African studies: Frederick Simoons in geography, David Ames in anthropology and Aristide Zolberg in political science. These contacts would later be consolidated with the creation of the Program of African Studies, which would also strengthen the position of African History in Wisconsin.

The relative success of Curtin in introducing African History in Wisconsin was due to several factors. The most obvious was his personal interest in the subject, but probably more important than that was his ability to insert African History within a wider framework. Curtin himself mentions that Comparative Tropical History was born not so much from a concern with African History itself, but rather from a dissatisfaction with the way history was taught in the United States.[56] Curtin was not only after a change in the way Africa was studied, but was also trying to provoke a change in the way in which history approached the study of both western and non-western worlds. This vision allowed him to justify his project in a department that was on the eve of change and expansion.

By the end to the 1950s, the History Department was beginning to feel the first symptoms of the unprecedented growth in the demand for higher education that characterised the 1960s. In 1957 the department had 21 members of staff, and was planning to increase this number given a projected growth in the number of students.[57] These projections also allowed Curtin to introduce new areas of specialisation. Finally, Curtin also benefited from the support given by the American Government and other funding agencies to African studies. This will be more evident later when the developments of the 1960s are examined.

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[55] Interview with P. Curtin. November 13, 1999. Oral History Project. Transcript of Interview with Philip D. Curtin. University of Wisconsin, 8/ 5/ 1975. p. 9. UWMA. Minute October 5, 1959. *History Department Departmental Meetings Minutes.* UWMA.

[56] Oral History Project. Transcript of Interview with Philip D. Curtin. 8/ 5/ 1975. p.7. UWMA.

[57] Department of History. "Report of the Committee on the Future of the Department." Minute January 14, 1958. *Department of History. Departmental Meetings Minutes.* UWMA.

The experiences of Herskovits in Northwestern and Curtin in Wisconsin are good illustrations of the practical problems of introducing African History in American academia. However, the two programs had different experiences in their attempts to establish the field of African History in their respective universities. There were, in my opinion, two reasons for this. First, the way in which each individual was selling his product. Curtin presented African History as being part of a new framework for the study of history as a whole. In the context of a department that was going through a "generational crisis" new approaches and perspectives on history were bound to be, at least partially, well- received. Herskovits was an outsider to the History Department. Even though his arguments in favour of African History were powerful, they linked the study of Africa to the understanding of race relations in the United States. As we have seen, this was not a popular subject in the 1950s. On the other hand, Herskovits presented the study of the African past as a way of enriching Anthropology, and not as way of transforming History. The second element that helped the establishment of African History in Wisconsin sooner than in Northwestern was the support received from the University administration. Thus, both Herskovits and Curtin were keen on introducing African History in their programs, but their approaches to the field and the support they received determined their success. One thing that was common to both men, however, is that African History was not perceived as valuable in its own right, but as part of a wider agenda. We will see later how this was to change in the 1960s when African History became a more defined field of study with the advent of independence in Africa.

In contrast with the developments in Tropical Africa, Great Britain and the United States, South African universities showed little interest in the exploration of new approaches to the study of Africa. With the success of the Nationalist party in 1948, apartheid became the social and political project that dominated race relations in the country until the 1980s. The 1950s also saw an awakening of resistance among the African population. This started as non-violent resistance in the Defiance Campaign. However, this did not have the results expected and more radical resistance was launched with the formation of the Pan-Africanist Congress. In March 1960, however, when the police shot against many of the participants in an anti-pass demonstration in Sharpeville, the government made it clear that it would not tolerate any kind of opposition. Sixty-nine unarmed individuals were killed. The two main African organisations, the African National Congress and the

Pan-African Congress, were banned. Universities were not exempt from the impact of apartheid. The University of Cape Town in the 1950s was, together with other universities in the country, trying to oppose the policy of segregation imposed by the government. The climate was tense and the environment was certainly not favourable for a subject like African History.

African History had a long way to go in UCT. In 1950, the History Department did not seem interested in the possibility of introducing African History in their syllabus. This was clearly dominated by European history, and the South African History course only covered the period from 1778.[58] The History Department at UCT was very small, with only four full-time members of staff. By 1951 the department was facing a serious shortage of staff. According to a memorandum prepared by the then head of department, H.J. Mandelbrote, between 1930 and 1950 the number of students had gone from 140 to 288. In the same period, the permanent teaching establishment had remained with one professor, one senior lecturer and one lecturer, with the only addition of a junior lecturer.[59] The need for extra staff would be a constant problem during the 1950s and 1960s, and it is possible to understand the difficulty of the department in opening new areas. However, one can also see that even if expansion had been possible, African History was not among the main priorities. In his recommendations for the creation of new posts, Mandelbrote expressed the need of the department for a specialist on Medieval history and also the need to introduce areas such as Modern history.[60]

H.J. Mandelbrote took the King George V Chair of History in 1936 when Walker left UCT for Cambridge. A graduate of Oxford, he specialised on constitutional and legal history.[61] During the 1950s he was researching the evolution of responsible government in the Cape Colony, and he made several contributions to the study of constitutional development in South Africa.[62]

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[58] University of Cape Town. *General Prospectus*. 1950.

[59] H.J. Mandelbrote. "Memorandum on Consolidation and development of the History Department." April, 1951. Minute April 12, 1951. *Minutes of the Board of the Faculty of Arts*. UCT.

[60] *Ibidem.*

[61] Saunders, C.C. *The Making of the South African Past*. 1988. p.121.

[62] UCT. *Report on Publications and Research in the University*. 1950-52. p.9.

Another member of the department was Jean van der Poel. She had been a student of Walker's and finished her doctoral studies at the London School of Economics. She joined the department in 1938 and took over the responsibility of teaching European history. Among the courses she taught were, Constitutional History of England, Nineteenth Century Social and Economic Development in Europe. Her research, however, touched on South African History. Her most important work was the book *The Jameson Raid* published in 1951. She also participated in the editing of the Smuts Papers, a task to which she dedicated herself for almost twenty years.[63]

A junior member of the department was G.B. Nourse. He researched topics such as Law Reform under the seventeenth century Commonwealth and the administration of Cromwell's generals.[64] In 1957 he presented a proposal to study the period between 1880-1910 in Zulu history. He obtained authorisation to study documents in London, Natal and the Cape.[65] However, in September 1958, he was authorised to change this topic to return to his previous interests.[66] In his report he said:

"I have to thank Faculty [sic] for sanctioning my switch to the Cromwellian period during my study leave. As soon as I reached London and delved into the sources I realized [sic] that my desire to read in any other field was only a temporary aberration."[67]

The only member of the History Department who was receptive to the new developments in African History was Leonard Thompson. He had read for a Honours degree in Oxford, and after the war he was offered a position in UCT. His research concentrated on constitutional and political history. By the early 1950s, he decided to investigate the political unification of the country, a project which culminated in the book *The Unification of South Africa, 1902-1910* published in 1960. Thompson was also active in liberal politics. He was involved with the Liberal Party, helped editing *The Open Universities in South Africa*, and was the

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[63] Saunders, C.C. *Op.cit.* 1988. p. 122. Jean van der Poel. Lecture Notes. *Jean van der Poel Papers.* UCT.

[64] UCT. *Report on Publications and Research in the University.* 1956-58. p. 6.

[65] Minute April 24, 1957. *Minutes of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* UCT.

[66] Minute September 30, 1958. *Minutes of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.*UCT.

[67] G.B. Nourse. "Report on study leave." Minute March 24, 1959. *Minutes of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* UCT.

chairman of the Students Health and Welfare Organisation.[68] It was also during the 1950s that Thompson started being influenced by the new historiography in Africa and Great Britain. In 1953 he spent some time doing research in the Institute of Commonwealth Studies. This visit may have been his first contact with the new ideas. In 1958 he met Roland Oliver during a trip the latter made to South Africa. Finally, in 1960, he attended the Leverhulme History Conference at the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. About this conference he wrote:

"I am very impressed by the range and the quality of the work that it is being done in the new university institutions in tropical Africa, particularly those which are in special relationship with London University. Indeed, I feel it is my duty to sound a note of warning. The Universities of South Africa are liable to be surpassed as the principal institutions of scholarship in this continent unless they receive much larger subsidies than they do at present."[69]

In 1959, Thompson became Head of Department at UCT. It is likely that this allowed him to introduce some innovations. Unfortunately, he was already disenchanted with the situation in South Africa and was thinking of leaving.[70]

Other members of staff at UCT were also becoming more and more aware of changes abroad. Between Monica Wilson, H.M. Robertson and L.M. Thompson a memorandum entitled "Expansion in the Study of Africa" was prepared and presented to the University Council in April 1960.[71] The memorandum set down a number of proposals to expand the range of African Studies offered at UCT. African History was among the new areas that were to be offered. It also suggested that funds might be obtained from an application to the Ford Foundation, and indicated their desire for the University to adopt a long time commitment to the expansion of the field. Finally, the memorandum requested that students accepted into the new courses could only be accepted on the basis of merit and not race.[72]

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[68] Saunders, C.C. *Op.cit.* 1988. p. 123-24.

[69] Thompson, L.M. "Report on special leave granted to attend the Leverhulme History Conference at the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, 5th to 15th of September, 1960." Minute September 27, 1960. *Minutes of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* UCT.

[70] Oliver, R.O. *Op.cit.* p.223.

[71] Minute April 5, 1960. *Council Minutes.* UCT.

[72] Memorandum "Expansion in the Study of Africa." Minute April 5, 1960. *Council Minutes.* UCT.

The Senate accepted most of the recommendations set out in this document. In reality, however, little was done to follow them. As it will be seen in the following section, African History was finally introduced in the History Department, but in a very limited form. Unfortunately, by the time this memorandum was submitted, Thompson, potentially the most important figure in the introduction of African History in Cape Town, was already thinking of leaving. In 1961 he resigned to the Chair at UCT and took a position in the University of California in Los Angeles.

The slow development of African History at UCT reveals the importance of the political environment in the establishment of the field. The situation in the History Department itself was not conducive to the introduction of new fields. However, the lack of support from the Government and the University made the situation even more difficult for historians such as Thompson, who were wishing to introduce changes.

Part 2.- First works on African History.

In the last section we looked at how some universities were receiving support and encouragement to develop the study of Africa. Some of them, like SOAS and the African colleges were particularly keen in exploring ways of developing the new field. However, it took some time for historians to develop a clear idea of what was African History. The historiographical production of the period reflects this uncertainty, but also contains some elements that already announce some of the characteristics of the new field. Despite the importance of the works published during the 1950s, they undoubtedly lack the confidence and authority which was characteristic of history produced a decade later.

To understand the limitations of these early works, one first has to identify them. Few of the works that were published during this period which have come to be regarded as works of African History, were in fact intended as African History. The problem then lies in choosing them and analysing them in that light. Such a process inevitably implies a level of arbitrariness that I do not intend to deny. However, this problem reveals the lack of definition in the field during this period. To identify the main trends in the historiography of the period I looked at the book reviews in three journals: The *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria (JHSN)* that was started in 1956; the *Transactions of the Gold Coast and Togoland*

Historical Society (TGCTHS) published since 1952; and finally, *Africa,* the Journal of the International African Institute.

The history and objectives of the first two journals were very different from the third. The first two were created to promote the study of African History in the African territories. They were to become the main platform for historians working in Africa during the 1950s. They also revealed many of the problems historians were then facing. One can find several discussions about oral traditions, the value of African archives, and the relationship between African and colonial history, for example. These journals reflect, to a large extent, the concerns of historians interested in African History, but they do not tell us much about what members of other disciplines thought about this new field. The third journal, *Africa,* helped to fill that gap.

Africa was a well-established journal, and was largely dominated by anthropologists and sociologists. This makes it interesting, given the fact that these were the main constituencies African History would have to convince. *Africa* published a larger number of reviews and had a wider readership in comparison with the two journals mentioned above. More importantly, it reflected different kinds of concerns. Writers and readers of *Africa* were not particularly concerned with the development of African History. Their main interest was to ensure that any new approach to the study of the continent operated according to the accepted rules of evidence and interpretation. Thus, *Africa* represents the opinions and values of a wider community that was carefully observing the development of the new field and made sure it stayed within acceptable boundaries.

Before going into the analysis of particular works, I will look at the general trends of the period. First, it has to be said that the number of works that I considered to have some historical content and analysis were very few if one compares them with later decades. Given this, one has to be careful in reading too much into the trends I will be presenting. Second, the majority of the works included in this analysis were reviewed in *Africa,* simply because there were very few reviews published in *JHSN* and *TGCTHS.*

In general, there was an important increase in works concerned with the African past. There was some continuity with topics traditionally investigated by colonial historians, such as colonial policy, the missionary role in social change, migrations, for example. There were also some new topics, such as Nationalism. The notion of a new African History was still not widespread, but there was a growing debate on the use of new kinds of sources and techniques.

Very few of the works produced at this stage were concerned with the precolonial past. From these, the main areas of research tended to be the political development of African kingdoms, cultural development, trade contacts, and religion, particularly Islam. Many of these works were anthropological or sociological analyses that attempted some level of historical research, but were, in the main, not works on history. Others were concerned with the early European penetration of Africa and a third group were some of the first works that tried to penetrate Africa's precolonial past through oral traditions. Examples of these would include *Government and Politics in Tribal Societies* by Schapera published in 1956, Duffy's *Portuguese Africa*, or the more historically oriented work of Ian Cunnison, *The Luapula Peoples of Northern Rhodesia*, published in 1959.

The bulk of the work produced in this period concentrated on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For this period, there was a slight increase in the variety of the problems studied. However, the analysis of political processes took pre-eminence. The main topics that were investigated were Nationalism, European expansion and British colonialism and administration, political development of African states. One of the most important books in this area was *Nationalism in Colonial Africa* by Thomas Hodgkin, published in 1956.

Religion and Church development were also important concerns. Islam continued to be a significant area of research. For this period, the Mahdiya movement and its political consequences were the focus of several studies. The nineteenth and twentieth century also witnessed the entrance of Christianity as an important contender in the religious competition in Africa. Christianity was frequently analysed through the work of missionaries and the establishment of African churches. Missionary work was usually analysed within the context of political expansion and social change. Works concerned with the history and impact of Islam and Christianity were J.S. Trimingham's *Islam in the Sudan* (1949) and

Islam in Ethiopia (1952), P.M. Holt's *The Mahdist State in the Sudan* (1958), Oliver's *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* (1952), C.P. Groves *The Planting of Christianity in Africa* (1955, 1958), Ruth Slade's *English speaking missions in the Congo independent state* (1959).

Economic history did not figure prominently. When it appeared, it was linked to political analyses and anthropological studies. An example of this was *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta* by K.O. Dike (1956). A significant number of works were concerned with the social relations between settlers and African communities in settler societies such as Kenya and Rhodesia. An example of this was *The Birth of a Plural Society* by L.H. Gann (1958).

There are a significant number of biographies. Most of them concerned Europeans, but there are some studies on African leaders. One can mention John Hargreaves' *The Life of Sir Samuel Lewis* (1958), Oliver's *Sir Harry Johnston and the Scramble for Africa* (1957) and G. Shepperson and T. Price's biography of John Chilembwe *Independent African* (1958).

Finally, there were a number of re-editions and compilations of original texts. The main issues dealt with in these were exploration, travel accounts, colonial administration and colonialism. It is obviously difficult to classify the production of historical work with absolute precision. However, it becomes evident that historical discourse during this period was dominated by political analysis, both in colonial and precolonial periods. What is also clear about these early works is that they lack the sense of purpose and confidence that will be seen in the 1960s. Even when some authors were aware of the innovations they were introducing, nobody took it to the point of calling it "African History."

Two works were published during this period, which were later considered as pioneering studies on African History -Kenneth Dike's *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885,* and Saburi Biobaku's *The Egba and their Neighbours.* A contemporary historian said:

"Dike and Biobaku's books became the models for the new historiography. In an important departure from conventional historical canons of the day, they

championed the use of oral tradition, which they used in their books to a limited extent together with British documents."[73]

Despite the praise received by these works, their impact at the time was considerably more limited than the last quote would allow us to believe. Dike and Biobaku did incorporate the use of oral traditions to a limited extent. However, by doing this they did not challenge the historical canons of the day. As a matter of fact, they applied those canons to their research on African History.

Kenneth Dike and Saburi Biobaku were the first two Nigerians to become professional historians. They went to Britain to do a Ph.D. in History with Gerald Graham in Kings College, London. The fact that they did manage to incorporate new kinds of sources and new areas of discussion is indicative of their interests and personal knowledge of these sources. However, it is also significant of the turn that the study of Colonial history was taking. It is very likely to think that Dike and Biobaku were interested in researching the African past and they probably saw in Colonial and Imperial history an adequate field to start those investigations. This coincides with the trends observed earlier in this work. A vague notion of African History that began to emerge in this period but was still constrained by the problems and questions related to the study of colonial territories.

In his book Dike presented a study of trade and its decisive influence in the history of West Africa:

"The history of West Africa is largely the history of five centuries of trade with European nations; commerce was the fundamental relationship that bound Africa to Europe."[74]

This view about trade in West Africa was not revolutionary. However, he introduced two important criticisms to previous works in this area:

"In West African History the concentration of studies on external factors such as the suppression of the slave trade, the work of the Navy, the era of the explorers, the forts and settlements along the coast, the policies and personalities of the various Foreign and Colonial Secretaries, has tended to submerge the history of the indigenous peoples and to bestow undue prominence on the activities of the

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[73] Alagoa, E.J. "Nigerian academic historians." Jewsiewicki, B. and D. Newbury (eds.) *African historiographies: What history for which Africa?* 1986. p. 191.

[74] Dike, K.O. *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885.* 1956. p.1.

invaders. As yet no comprehensive assessment of the African middlemen's position in the Atlantic slave trade exists; few if any studies have displayed the real magnitude of the revolution brought about by the prohibition of the traffic from 1807 or the full effects of abolition on the existing native governments. As an instance, a major thread in West African History -the character of the association of the coastal kingdom with European traders- is treated, if at all, as merely incidental to the subject; yet without of knowledge of this association the position of power occupied by the African middlemen in the period of the slave trade cannot be appreciated."[75]

Dike here emphasises two areas that had been neglected. First, "the effects of abolition in native governments;" and second, the role of the African middle-man in the trade. By highlighting these issues, Dike recovered the role and importance of Africans as actors and not just as subjects or victims of colonial intervention.[76]

Despite these important innovations, Dike's main concern continued to be the role of trade in the process of colonisation of Africa. In his view, the West African experience provided a good example of the ways in which imperialism had made its way into Africa:

"This region provides the best illustration of the process by which the trading activities of 500 years led in the nineteenth century to the political subjection of West Africa to Europe. The history of the Niger Delta in the years 1830-85 is therefore the history of one of the highways of imperialism in West Africa..."[77]

Despite these innovations, *Trade and Politics* followed a number of trends that characterised "Colonial history." The approach to trade adopted by Dike, mainly dominated by political analysis, was typical of "Imperial historiography." Dike's contribution was to introduce a new element to this tradition, the notion of African agency. Dike also made a case for the use of oral sources, even though he accepted this had to be controlled and compared with other sources. Probably more important is the fact that Dike also tried to complement his research with local written sources. Few historians at the time went through the trouble of travelling to the colonial territories to collect these materials. Dike certainly proved this was an important task to be undertaken.

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[75] *Ibidem.* p.4.

[76] It is important to notice that Dike was aware of the work of previous historians such as Carl Reindorf and that in his book he praised the attempts of those early historians to recover the activities and experiences of Africans.

[77] Dike,K.O. *Op.cit.* 1956. p. 18.

"By far the most important materials on the internal politics and trade organisation of the Delta are in the city-states themselves. Nineteenth century history is very much alive in the Delta. The descendants of the leading personalities of this period possess papers dealing with every phase of their past. The main problem is the pulling together of these scattered but valuable historical manuscripts. Each family guards its own possessions jealously."[78]

But how did the academic community receive these innovations? The review in *Africa* was revealing of wider debates that surrounded the emergence of African History:

"In his attempt to describe the internal politics of Bonny Dr. Dike has been misled by the limitations of the materials he used. It is not possible to understand what was happening inside Bonny unless one has grasped the character of Bonny social structure, and this was not within the comprehension of the consuls, naval captains, and traders on whose accounts he relies...
It is perhaps, hardly fair to blame a historian for his failure to make anything of the social anthropology of a region so deficient in published material, but it is necessary to call attention to the risk historians run, in the absence of such knowledge, of introducing misconceptions into their interpretations of the documents they have so painstakingly studied."[79]

Jones' opinions are important because they reveal some of the questions that historians of Africa would have to resolve. The notion that the history of African societies could be researched in the same ways as the history of European peoples would become an important area of debate. The emphasis on the importance of anthropology precisely points to the idea that the study of African History was a particular kind of history. Thus, it required the particular kind of knowledge that anthropologists provided. Since then, one can see a growing debate about the nature of African History and the ways in which it should be approached.

Biobaku's book, *The Egba and their Neighbours, 1842-1872,* introduced elements similar to those seen in Dike's *Trade and Politics.* In it, the author attempted to turn a topic traditionally studied by historians of the colonies into a problem of reaction and participation of an African society, the Egba.

"I have reconstructed the Egba state from the original homes of the Egba and have shown how it was transplanted to the composite town of Abekouta in 1830. Then begins the main study which is essentially a study of the reaction of indigenous peoples to outside events: the impact of transatlantic slave trade, the return of kinsmen once carried away into slavery; the advent of the missionary enterprise;

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[78] *Ibidem.* p. 225.

[79] Jones, G.I. "Review of *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1835.*" *Africa.* 27, (1) 1957. p.85.

the installation of official British influence and, later, power at Lagos; and the groupings towards the expansion of trade into the interior."[80]

Despite the fact that Biobaku's analysis is centred in the nineteenth century, he made an important attempt to go further back in the history of the Egba. For a professional historian, this was a remarkable thing to do.

"Oral evidence is important for this study, because the African tradition was to rely upon memory for the transmission of history. Remembered material is suspect in many ways but it has been cautiously used after being checked and cross-checked, and divested from elements of romanticism, political propaganda, and naked fabrication. The attempt to use a carefully prepared questionnaire failed because such an approach is premature where the majority of witnesses are illiterate and in the absence of paid inquirers. It has been necessary therefore, to rely upon the personal interviews, with the aid of guide questions, and over six months were exclusively devoted to the task of the Yoruba country, visiting original sites of the Egba townships and questioning knowledgeable people everywhere. I motored, on the average, over 1,000 miles per month."[81]

Given the time and thought devoted to the research on oral materials, one can see that Biobaku gave a good deal of importance to this kind of evidence. He obviously realised that no study of the political and social development of the Egba would be complete without a longer view into their history.

However, his attempt to go back into the history of the Egba was not easily accepted. The same reviewer who had explained the limitations in the work of Dike expressed his opinions about Biobaku's book:

"Actually, the Egba, like so many African tribes, only emerge into history during the nineteenth century. For periods before this they have only obscure and often conflicting traditions whose analysis is outside the scope of this work. Chapter I 'Origins' consists, therefore, of statements derived from three very different 'sources', namely oral tradition, unverifiable ethnological theories, and semi-historical facts, which owing to their relationship to actual and usually later historical facts, can be given an approximate date. It is a pity that Dr. Biobaku does not distinguish more clearly between these three different kind of data, and that he does not warn the reader more clearly that the real history of the Egba starts with the establishment of the town of Abekouta."[82]

Biobaku's use of oral data in conjunction with other sources certainly lacked sophistication of modern analyses. However, this is understandable given the fact

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[80] Biobaku, Saburi O. *The Egba and their neighbours, 1842-1872.* 1957. p. I.

[81] *Ibidem.* p. 117.

[82] Jones, G.I. "Review of *The Egba and their neighbours, 1842-1872.*" *Africa.* 28, (2) 1958. p. 172.

that it was just a first attempt to incorporate these traditions in a western- style historical narrative. Moreover, the reviewer warned the historians against the dangers of using these traditions to project the existence of relatively modern forms of social identification into the deep past. In doing this, Jones was raising an issue that has worried contemporary historians concerned with the "invention of tradition" and the creation of identity.

The works of Dike and Biobaku raised some reflections upon the questions that the study of the African past first posed to historians. They particularly highlighted the need for the integration of disciplines such as Anthropology for the understanding of African peoples. Later generations will recognise the need of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the African past. Reviewers gave particular importance to the incorporation of anthropological knowledge in the study of African societies.[83] However, nobody seemed to reflect on the implications that such interdisciplinary approach could have for our understanding of African History.

The main contribution of Dike and Biobaku was to introduce questions of African agency through their work in colonial history and to establish the potential of local archival and oral sources. However, they failed to grasp the complexity of oral traditions in their double role as historical record and as articulation of modern political concerns. The works of Dike and Biobaku show how it was difficult to draw a clear line between African and Colonial history. Particularly when they were concerned with understanding the role of Africans during the colonial experience. Although they certainly introduced some crucial elements for the study of the African past, they also showed that there were instances were Colonial and African History were difficult to separate.

The political situation in Africa was about to open the doors for radical changes. The 1950s were years of uncertainty for historians of Africa, but it was also when Africans decided to go all the way to achieve their independence. Academics of the time did not find it difficult to become interested, and to some extent

[83] It should also be mentioned that the relationship between history and anthropology in the study of African History has also raised the historical sensitivity of anthropologists.

inspired, by such events. A reflection of this concern was the popularity of Nationalism as a topic of research. It is not surprising that one of the most influential publications of the time was an analysis of this issue. In 1956 Thomas Hodgkin published *Nationalism in Colonial Africa.* The book was not strictly a study of history, however, it gave history an important role.

"Anyone who tries to handle such a theme is bound to owe a great deal to anthropologists and sociologists, particularly to those among them who have given special attention to the phenomena of social change. But this book is a study in politics, not in sociology: this is to say, it is an attempt to describe, and where possible to account for, the political institutions and ideas of African nationalism, in some relation to their history."[84]

Hodgkin acknowledged the contribution of anthropologists to the understanding of African institutions. However, this book revealed also the importance he gave to the study of historical elements. It was an important recognition of the fact that a modern phenomenon such as Nationalism could not be understood without a study of the past of African societies.

Hodgkin's analysis of Nationalism was symptomatic of the effect that the whole process of decolonization had in the way Africa was perceived by academics. Nationalism, more than any other issue, signalled the capacity and will of Africans to gain control of their own destinies. From the point of view of historians it was living proof of African agency which would become the centre for the new field. More importantly, Hodgkin treated Nationalism in Africa not as phenomenon unique to Africa, but as part of more universal tendencies in world history.

"The nationalisms which have developed during the last 150 years- in south eastern Europe, in the Arab world, in India and the Far East- have already been studied from this political standpoint. There seems no reason why a similar method of treatment should not be usefully applied to the new nationalisms in Africa. Indeed there is some advantage in ceasing to regard Africa, as it has sometimes been regarded in the past, as a kind of 'thing-in-itself', the private preserve of *Africanistes* [sic] This implies an approach which recognises African nationalism, in its many manifestations, as an historical movement, necessarily

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[84] Hodgkin, T. *Nationalism in Colonial Africa.* 1956. p.16. It is worth mentioning that Hodgkin's work was the result of his activities in the Extra-mural department at the University College of Ghana. The most revolutionary historical work at the time came from members of this department such as Hodgkin, Dennis Austen and Ivor Wilks.

and characteristically African, yet revealing definite points of resemblance to the nationalisms that have emerged in other parts of the world."[85]

Hodgkin here is pointing to an important problem in African History, the tension between the universal and the particular. This is a question that is characteristic to all areas of historical research. However, it has been particularly important in our understanding of African History. In this early period, Hogdkin's analysis points to this problem and makes the case for a more universalistic approach to the study of Africa. In years to come, historians of Africa would continue to debate if the history of Africa can be studied as other field of history or if it demands a particular methodology.

Towards the end of the 1950s independence was becoming a reality for many colonies. This had an striking impact on the work and confidence of historians of Africa. The most evident proof of this can be seen, not surprisingly, in the work of a non-professional, Basil Davidson and his book *Old Africa Rediscovered.* This text was more a synthesis of the work done by academics rather than the result of original research. However, it became very popular because of its accessibility. It set out to prove the viability and importance of African History, it put a huge emphasis on the precolonial period, and is centred on the study of old kingdoms and empires. In addition to this, it is presented with a large dose of romanticism and a still immature use of the sources.

Old Africa Rediscovered was criticised by many for its romanticism. However, it has probably the first text to openly challenge the view of the impossibility of an African History independent of historiography of the colonial period. This was obviously related to the political situation where the rejection of colonialism was more than academic.

"*Old Africa Rediscovered* is fundamentally a challenge to scholarship, particularly African scholarship. Who were the ancestors of African peoples? What are the exact lines of migration? What were precisely the points of growth and irradiation of indigenous African civilising ideas and technology. At a time when Africa is extricating itself from servitude, it is of great importance that it should be asserted that Africa's past was not just 'the void of a motionless past', and that

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[85] *Ibidem.* pp. 16-17.

in every sphere of endeavour, Africa had made, and will continue to make her [sic] own contribution to the common culture of humanity."[86]

The popularity of *Old Africa Rediscovered* was proof of the confidence that independence injected into the study of the African past. Nationalism and independence gave historians of Africa the right intellectual environment to cut their links to colonial history and also continued to provide the institutional and economic support which historians had enjoyed so far. Within this new environment, the 1960s would witness the consolidation of a new historiography of Africa.

[86] Anene, J.C. "Review of *Old Africa Rediscovered.*" *JHSN.* 2, (1) 1960.

CHAPTER III

Expansion and Consolidation.

The 1960s witnessed the consolidation of the academic study of African history. During this period the interest in Africa increased. Newly independent countries emerged and a new political climate put Africa in the map of world politics. The practical and intellectual needs of the new countries stimulated the study of the African past in African institutions. Here, African history was part of a much wider intellectual effort to redefine Africa as a social and political member of an emerging post-war world order. In this respect, Nation-building was more than the mere consolidation of national borders, constitutions and governments. It required an intellectual framework that could define the new nations socially and politically.

Nationalism and Nation-building also had an influence on the consolidation of African history in Great Britain and the United States. However, the particular circumstances of their educational systems provided a number of different elements, which set different bases for their approach to Africa. In this respect it can be seen how the institutional development of the field set certain limits to the historiography. In African universities the climate of Nation-building provided an ideal environment for the development of African history. This process, however, was also affected by local circumstances such as previous intellectual traditions, the history of the university itself and the political situation at the time.

In Great Britain the economic, political and educational conditions of the 1960s stimulated an expansion in the study of Africa. Historians of Africa in British institutions were keen to incorporate the subject into the wider educational and academic system. To some extent, they managed to achieve their objectives with relative ease, despite the scepticism among the wider academic community. The expansion of the university system also allowed them to secure positions in British universities. This was particularly important for many historians that had worked in African colleges and now had the opportunity to bring their expertise to British universities.

The 1960s also saw an important institutional expansion in the United States. Here, African history developed within the context of African Studies, an area that enjoyed high levels of support from the Government and private foundations. The field of history experienced a particular growth during this period. This can be attributed to several factors. First, there was an increased political consciousness among young students in the 1960s. This was particularly influenced by the Civil Rights Movement and the anti-colonial discourses emanating from Africa. Second, there was a greater interest in the study of non-western areas of the world (largely encouraged by the large sums of money put in these new fields).

Hence one can see that the consolidation of African history as a field of study was possible in the context of a transformation in the political status of Africa. This provoked governments and institutions to support the study of Africa even when some sectors of the academic community still showed some signs of scepticism. The support received was employed by a growing group of researchers that could devote their efforts to reinforce the foundations of the new field.

Part I.- The expansion of African history in universities.

A) Nationalist history in Legon and Dar es Salaam.

The post-independence atmosphere, which prevailed throughout Africa during the 1960s, was the natural environment for the development of new approaches to the study of Africa in general. The impact of Nationalism and Nation-building on the development of African Studies was mainly felt in African Universities, however, from there it extended to other areas and was affected by different sets of conditions.

It was seen in previous chapters how African universities were created not only to provide high quality education to Africans, but also to encourage and advance research on local issues. The development of research in African universities became fundamental during the post-independence years. Many questioned the adequacy of the organisation inherited from colonial years. So, the 1960s became a period of redefinition of the aims, goals and organisation of African universities. The University College of Ghana was an example of this process. In 1957 Ghana achieved independence. Nationalism had been the main social and political force behind political liberation. Kwame Nkrumah, leader of the Convention People's

Party the main political force in the new country, soon made clear that the University would have to change in order to accommodate the needs of Nation-building.

The University College of Ghana became the University of Ghana in the 1961-62 academic year after severing its links with the University of London. The new institution, however, had to face a number of criticisms. Members of the nationalist elite were unhappy with the way in which the University operated. Kwame Nkrumah for example, said: "While I fully subscribe to the vital principle of academic freedom, a university must relate its activities to the needs of the society in which it exists."[1] To address this discontent and recommend ways of Africanising Legon, an International Committee on University Education was appointed.[2]

The criticism against Legon focused on three issues. First, the University was seen as implementing the Oxbridge system to the point of being an elitist institution. This prevented it to contribute to the government's plans of taking education to the masses. Second, it was perceived as a centre of support for the cause of colonialism. Third, there was a belief that the university promoted an environment of opposition against the government.[3]

The Commission took all these criticism into account. The framework proposed in its final report emphasised the need to break with the social limitations inherent in the residential Oxbridge system. More important was the proposal to promote the study of African culture and the links with other African universities.[4] The reform of the university was not only seen as a social and academic need of the country. It also became an explosive political issue, which put the university and the new government in direct conflict.

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[1] Quoted in Nwauwa, A.O. *Imperialism, academe and nationalism: Britain and university education for Africans 1860-1960.* 1997. p. 214.

[2] Agbodeka, F. *A History of the University of Ghana.* 1998. p. 123. This committee was formed of American, Russian and British members. It is also worth remembering that much of Nkrumah's criticism came from the fact that he had been trained in the American and not the British system.

[3] *Ibidem.* pp. 124-125.

[4] *Ibidem.* pp. 125-126.

The university started implementing some of the recommendations made by the International Commission. Changes were made to the entrance requirements that had so far been determined by the success of students in secondary schools. The CPP promoted the use of trade union scholarships to encourage mature students. The university also started to receive some non-resident students and established some facilities for part-time education. In the main, however, Legon continued to be a residential university. More African academics were brought to positions of influence, and new units in the university were created such as the Institute of African Studies and the Ghana Universities Press.[5] These changes however, were not enough to the government who seemed to have specific views on the way in which the recommendations were to be implemented.

Ghanaian politics under the CPP were becoming more and more centralised and the reform of the University became focal to the political and ideological program of the party. Between 1961 and 1964 the Government adopted policies and decisions which caused a frontal conflict with the University. Two controversial decisions were the abolition of the Department/Institute of Extra-Mural Studies and its substitution by the Institute of Public Education, and the attempts from the Government to directly intervene in academic appointments within the university.

The Department/Institute of Extra-Mural Studies (IEMS) had been active since 1948 but it did not enjoy the co-operation of the whole university. The new university framework recommended that this university-wide contact was needed if the IEMS was to have a significant impact nationally. However, the Government had a more comprehensive reform in mind. Ever since the end of the 1950s the Government tried to re-orient the work of the IEMS. The Government saw this reform as a central political element. So much that in 1959 Nkrumah had said: "If reforms do not come from within, we intend to impose them from outside and no resort to the cry of academic freedom (for academic freedom does not mean irresponsibility) is going to restrain us".[6] Since 1960 there had been attempts to create an Institute of Public Education (IPE) but this did not occur until 1962. The new Institute was established under the direction of Prof. J.C. de Graff Johnson of

[5] *Ibidem.* pp. 127-133.

[6] Quoted in *Ibidem.* p. 140.

the IEMS, and Mr. K.O. Hagan, National Secretary of People's Education Association of Ghana, as a Deputy director. In addition, a Special Council for the Institute was established "to ensure the closest possible links between the work of the new Institute and the overall aspirations and needs of the country."[7] The destiny of the IEMS at this point was yet not decided, but it was eventually abolished in 1964. The majority of members of staff were transferred to the IPE; however the IPE council insisted that six individuals would be relieved of their appointments in the Institute ty and relocated in the University. These six members of staff were expatriates, and were not trusted to be loyal to the CPP ideology. Despite the attempts from the Vice-Chancellor Conor O'Brien to retain academic control over the IPE, he never obtained confirmation from the Government in this respect, and the University had to go through what was seen as a violation of academic freedom.[8]

The University Education Commission also recommended the establishment of an Institute of African Studies (IAS). In 1961 such an Institute was established. The idea of its creation first appeared at the beginnings of the University College, when a School of African Studies was established. This school was closed in 1950 but the research generated by it was developed in the department of Sociology and Archaeology. In 1960 a committee on African studies was appointed. The first step to establish the new institute was the appointment of a committee of African studies. This consisted of Peter Shinnie, Ivor Wilks and Kwabena Nketia whose role was to co-ordinate African studies in several departments. The IAS was created as a centre for research and teaching within the University of Ghana. The first director was Thomas L. Hodgkin and the institute was organised in four main sections: Modern African States, in charge of Hodgkin, African Music and related Arts under Prof. Nketia, African historical studies with Ivor Wilks as head, and African Languages.[9]

Nkrumah saw the creation of the Institute as a useful political platform. He charged the IAS with the responsibility of promoting Pan-African ideas and the elimination of colonial influences. He also made sure that the IAS received

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[7] *Ibidem.*

[8] *Ibidem.* p.141.

[9] Ivor Wilks, Thomas Hodgkin had both been part of the IEMS.

substantial economic support to undertake its projects.[10] This allowed a very healthy growth of the IAS. Within three years since its creation almost all its sections were established.

University reform also had an impact on other departments of the University. In this context the history department was under pressure to increase the African content in their courses and to replace their expatriate staff with African members. Given the general scarcity of trained historians in the field and the immaturity of the subject, both aims were difficult to accomplish. However, the history department in Ghana found itself in a relatively good position thanks to the work carried out during the previous ten years.

By 1960 the history department at Legon had already recruited two Ghanaian lecturers, A.A. Boahen and I. Tufuoh. Both had done their honours degree at Legon and were awarded scholarships to do post-graduate studies in England. Boahen went to SOAS and Tufuoh went to New College, Oxford. They returned to Legon in 1959 and made an important contribution to the teaching and research of African history. Boahen's research was concerned with the British penetration of the Sahara in the nineteenth century and the social and economic history of the Niger basin. Tufuoh focused his attention on the influence of Christian missions in the development of government policy in the nineteenth century Gold Coast.[11]

Boahen's work was published in 1964 and it was still mainly concerned with the impact of Britain's penetration of Africa. However, as Boahen said, he has made an effort "to bring out what the reaction of African rulers to these European explorers and traders was."[12] Boahen was aware of the limitations he faced if he wanted to present a more complete picture of the political and social situation of the region. Probably for this reason he decided to focus on the impact of British activities. The exploration of African structures and dynamics was mainly examined in two appendixes, the first devoted to the "Political conditions in the Western Sudan in the first half of the nineteenth century", and the second to the Islamic *jihads* of the nineteenth century in Bornu and Hausaland. Most of the

[10] Interview with I. Wilks. October 12, 1999.

[11] University College of Ghana. *Annual Report.* 1959-1960. p. 65.

[12] Boahen, A.A. *Britain, the Sahara and the Western Sudan, 1788-1861.* 1964. p.VII.

information for these accounts was taken from the works of explorers such as Clapperton and Barth. He also included some early scholarly work by H.C.F. Smith who would soon become an authority in the study of Islamic sources in Africa. It was precisely the lack of access and knowledge of these sources that handicapped Boahen's possibilities of approaching the study of this region from an African perspective.

"Until the masses of Arabic material being collected in Nigeria have been organized and made available to scholars, any attempt at a detailed study of social, economic, and political conditions in the Sahara and the Western Sudan in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries will be premature. On the other hand, the sources available now do make a full study of the activities of the British in the Sahara and the Western Sudan during the period 1788-1861 not only feasible but even long overdue."[13]

The arrival of Boahen and Tufuoh signalled the beginning of the Africanisation of staff in Legon's history department. During the 1960s the department lost most of its original staff. First on the list was John Fage who left at the end of the 1958-59 academic year and joined the history department at SOAS. G.W. Irwin, who worked on West African history, particularly the Dutch East and West Indian companies briefly replaced him. Irwin, however, left in 1963.

Later in the decade, in 1964, more former students of the department returned from SOAS and joined the staff. D.B. Birmingham (who had done his undergraduate studies at Legon), a specialist on Portuguese Africa, D.Y. Daaku, who worked on trade and politics in the Gold Coast, and J.K. Fynn, who worked in the Ashanti empire and conducted a project in the collection of traditions of the Fante states.[14] Other historians who joined the department during this decade were Robert Ado-Fenning as a lecturer in modern India, A. van Dantzig, a specialist in Dutch West Africa, P. Jenkins who worked in the expansion of Christianity in Ghana, and A.A. Iliasu who worked on history of Northern Ghana. This shows the significant growth of the department during this period. In 1959 the department had seven lecturers of whom just two were Africans. By 1969 just one of the original members of staff remained (R.G.S. Sprigge) and the number of lecturers had gone up to twelve from which nine were Africans.[15] The relative ease

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[13] *Ibidem.*

[14] University of Ghana. *Annual Report.* 1964-65. p.48.

[15] University of Ghana. *Annual Report.* 1968-69. p. 107-108.

with which members of staff were recruited in the 1960s was partially a result of the improvements made in the syllabus during the previous decade. The increasing amount of African material introduced in the syllabus encouraged and prepared undergraduate students to pursue a professional career in African history. Nation-building, however, demanded more changes.

Between 1963 and 1970 the general structure and content of the history honours syllabus was constantly revised and modified.[16] The increase in staff made it possible to finally shift the general orientation of the syllabus from European to African history. It also allowed an extension of the teaching of the department. For example, courses in the Modern History of India, the Modern History of Latin America and the Modern History of China and Japan were also introduced.[17] By 1967 the syllabus covered the whole of the African continent. It included a paper in the archaeology of Africa, only two papers in the history of Europe, papers on Modern Russia, Latin America and India and the possibility to follow a two-subject combined course which allowed students to combine history with Economics, Political Science or Sociology.[18] In 1963-64 it became possible for students in the University of Ghana to pursue M.A. and Ph.D. courses. Although history students continued to go abroad for some time, this was a significant development. Particularly important was the MA in African Studies offered in the IAS.

Together with the History department, the IAS was instrumental in many of the achievements that the University of Ghana produced in the field of history. In 1961-62 T.L. Hodgkin was appointed director of the Institute. Other researchers with interest in history soon joined him. Ivor Wilks, who was appointed Deputy director, continued his work on Arabic documents and the history of Ashanti. He too had been a member of the IEMS as a teacher of Political Philosophy. He soon became aware of the importance of local history among African communities and started to gather sources and information through his teaching work in the north of the country. This early work was the basis of systematic projects within the IAS such as the Arabic Manuscripts Project and the Asante Court Records Project. Wilks remembers the 1960s as a flourishing period in the history of the IAS.[19]

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[16] "Structure of degree courses and related matters." [n.d] *Academic Board Meetings*. 1964-65. UGBL.

[17] "Amendments to syllabus in history." [n.d.] *Academic Board Meetings*. 1963-64. UGBL.

[18] Agenda, June 29, 1967. *Academic Board Meetings*. 1966-67. UGBL.

[19] Interview with I. Wilks. October 12, 1999.

The institute produced research of the highest level, and attracted, for short periods, highly recognised scholars. This was reflected in the popularity of its MA in African Studies. In this course students could choose to specialise in one of five fields: Linguistic studies, the Arts, Historical Studies, Social studies and Political studies. The historical offerings for the MA in African Studies show how ambitious the program was. Students could take courses in Eastern Africa, Northern Africa, the Western Sudan to 1900, Central and Southern Africa, Historical geography, and West Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas. In addition to this, students also had the option to take African historical linguistics, from the Linguistics studies offerings, courses on Social change, political evolution and economic development. This variety in courses and the quality of teachers and researchers in the IAS made of this MA course one of the most complete in this decade, something that attracted students from beyond Ghana.

Research carried in the IAS and the history department was varied, although in large part it concentrated upon Ghana and West Africa. There was close co-operation between both centres. Some important areas of research were the formation of West African states, trade routes, traditional government and politics (Ashanti, Akwamu and Akwapim, and the formation of Islamic states.[20] There was a strong emphasis on the political history of the major Akan states and also on the study of the colonial period.[21] In 1968-69 UNESCO designated the IAS as a regional centre for research in the forest zone of West Africa. This reinforced the position of the University of Ghana as a major centre for research in African history.[22]

The growth and expansion of the history department and the IAS could not have been possible without the economic support of the Government. As it was mentioned before, University reform was a central political concern for Nkrumah and his party. For this reason, economic support for subjects that were seen as important, such as history or the activities of the IAS was relatively generous. The sixties certainly were a difficult time for the University in political terms, but one may be allowed to conclude that despite these conflicts, fields like African history benefited from the influence of Nationalism. This may be explained by the fact

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[20] University of Ghana. *Annual Report.* 1968-69. p. 148.

[21] Interview with R. Addo-Fenning. April 22, 1999.

[22] University of Ghana. *Annual Report.* 1968-69. p.148.

that most of the historical production of Legon coincided and supported the concerns and interests of the Nationalist government. The emphasis on pre-colonial African states served the historians' objective to destroy myths of African passivity and under-achievement. But it also fed a legitimising propaganda for the government. This coincidence was possible in the West African context given the old nationalist tradition, which had emphasised the connection between pre-colonial African states and African initiative. One can follow this tradition back to the nineteenth century in works such as the *History of the Gold Coast* of Carl Reindorf, and the writings of other West African intellectuals. It was this tradition of Nationalism, very specific to West Africa, which largely influenced historical work in the University of Ghana.

In East Africa, in the newly independent country of Tanzania, a new university college was being created and with it a new history department. By 1960, when Tanganyika became independent from Great Britain there were plans for the establishment of a university college in this territory. In 1958 it was recommended that a Principal should be appointed to the University College of Tanganyika in 1961-62 and that the College would start with a Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences in 1964, and a Faculty of Science in 1965. With the advent of independence in 1960 discussions continued for the future of the College. In 1963 the University of East Africa was inaugurated and the University College of Dar es Salaam became part of it, together with the University College of Makerere in Uganda, and the University College of Nairobi in Kenya. Initially, the College began with a Faculty of Law, which opened in 1961. In 1964 the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences started its activities and within it the new history department.

Tanzania was well behind Ghana in its efforts to recover its historical past and the creation of a historiographical tradition. The new department soon addressed this delay. Between 1964 and 1967 the department was adequately staffed with a group of young historians who had taken the offer to research and teach African history. As in the case of Fage and Oliver, these historians belonged to a generation that welcomed the study of non-European cultures, given their

contacts with many of them during the war, and were happy to take job offers that were more advantageous than those available in Britain.[23]

During the first decade of its life the department employed historians such as J. McCracken, J. Iliffe, E. Alpers, J. Lonsdale, W. Rodney, J. Sutton, A.J. Temu, I. Kimambo, A. Roberts, G. Gwassa and T. Ranger. Their experiences with African history were varied. Ranger, for example, had done his PhD in Oxford on Irish history under no less than Hugh Trevor-Roper. He became interested on issues of race relations and decided to teach in Asia or Africa. As things turned out, he secured a position in the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland where he started his research on Zimbabwe's history.[24] Others like Isaria Kimambo, Andrew Roberts and Walter Rodney had already received training in African history. Kimambo was one of the first history graduates from the Program of African Studies at Northwestern. Roberts had been one of the first students of Jan Vansina at Wisconsin and Walter Rodney had graduated from SOAS. Thus, this department really benefited from the institutional expansion of African Studies in the previous decade.

The challenge faced by these men was, in many ways similar to that of the Fages and Olivers from 10 years before. However, they were able to take advantage of the significant achievements made by their predecessors. This, and the fact that the department was new, with no colonial baggage, allowed for a high level of innovation and success.

The new department soon enjoyed some of the benefits of ten years of training in African history. Just after three years it was able to incorporate three Tanzanian historians I. Kimambo, A. Temu and G. Gwassa, the three of them specialised on East African history. They were also able to introduce a remarkable syllabus. The drive to reform the traditional history syllabus came from the need to transform primary school education. Ranger and his colleagues took over the challenge and introduced a syllabus more centred on topics rather than geographic areas.[25] In 1967 the syllabus included a Survey Course in African history, History of Eastern

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[23] Ranger, T.O. "Concluding remarks." Kirk-Greene, A.H.M. (ed.) *The emergence of African history in British universities.* 1995. p. 166. Interview with J. McCracken. July 7, 1999.

[24] Ranger, T.O. *Op.cit.* 1995. p.166-167.

[25] Interview with I. Kimambo. March 3, 1999.

Africa, Comparative Studies in Colonialism and Nationalism, and Historians and Revolutions. This syllabus was not dominated by European history as had been the case with the first syllabuses at Legon, nor was it solely focused on African history. It reflected the concern by members of the department of putting African experience at the centre of African history. It also, however, was an attempt to situate African processes in the context of world history.

The syllabus shows some concerns of historians of Africa at the time. Not only does it show a significant amount of African material; it also attempts to incorporate areas previously considered outside the scope of African history. The survey course, for example, "An Outline of History of Africa" was described as "The study of the History of Africa including North Africa, and of related areas such as the Indian Ocean complex."[26] There was also the intention to re-interpret the relationships between these areas. In the "History of Eastern Africa" historians tried to redress the neglect of the history of the interior when compared to the history of the coast: "While proper attention will be given to the history of the coast and its relation to extra-African cultures the emphasis will be on the history of the interior and the relation of the area to African developments in general."[27]

On a second level, this syllabus was also evidence of the interest of Dar es Salaam historians in the study of the African experience in a wider geographical and historical context. One example of this was the course "Comparative Studies in Colonialism and Nationalism" which proposed a comparative approach to the study of Colonialism and Nationalism, looking at the experiences of South America, Ireland and India.[28]

Despite these achievements the political situation in Tanzania would soon call for more radical transformations. In 1967 the Arusha Declaration was proclaimed and under the leadership of Julius Nyerere Tanzania adopted a socialist policy founded on the notion of self-reliance. As it was seen in the case of Ghana, the new African nations had a need to integrate their social and political needs with

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[26] University of Dar es Salaam. *Report [of a] conference on the role of the University College Dar es Salaam in a Socialist Tanzania. March 11-13, 1967.* p.95-96. Unpublished manuscript. University of Dar es Salaam Africana Library.

[27] *Ibidem.*

[28] *Ibidem.*

their educational facilities. Criticism on the "elitism" in the University was also strong in Tanzania. In 1966 334 students from the University College were sent home under armed escort after a demonstration against the decision of the Government to introduce National Service. These events raised questions on the role of the University under the policy of self-reliance and forced the University to open a debate on these issues. This debate occurred in the "Conference on the Role of the University College Dar es Salaam in Socialist Tanzania" which was convened in 1967.

The Conference produced a final report that included a number of recommendations. Despite the fact that this report was never officially adopted, it had a great influence in the discussions in the University between 1967 and 1970, and most of its recommendations were implemented.[29] The main recommendation of the Conference said: "The Conference recommends that it is the responsibility of the College to impart political education and that a course in political education that would be compulsory for Tanzanians and optional for non-Tanzanians should be started in the College."[30] In addition to this there were suggestions to review curriculum and teaching methods, to give priority to African staff over foreign staff, to allow study leave in socialist countries and to promote the practice of self-reliance in everyday life.[31]

Following these recommendations the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences initiated a debate aimed to re-organise it according to the new guidelines. The Faculty was organised around subject-based departments. Questions were raised on the suitability of this type of organisation to meet the manpower requirements of the country. One group thought that the single-honours approach complied with those requirements. However, another group argued that the organisation by departments would not allow the restructuring of the Faculty. In the end a compromise prevailed. Academic departments were retained but career streams and sub-streams that allowed a more flexible and interdisciplinary formation replaced the single-honours system. In addition, two courses were introduced:

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[29] Itandala, A.B. "Impact of the Arusha Declaration on higher education in Tanzania" in *The African Review*. 16, (1&2), 1989. p.4.

[30] University College of Dar es Salaam. *Report [of a] Conference on the role of the University College Dar es Salaam in a Socialist Tanzania. March 11-13, 1967.* p.56.Unpublished Manuscript. University of Dar es Salaam, Africana Library.

[31] *Ibidem.* 56-58.

East African Societies and Environment and Methods of Social Research. However, this compromise did not satisfy everybody. The debate was seen by many not as an academic discussion but as a political one. As a result, several lecturers left the University in the 1970s.[32]

Former members of the department remember their involvement in these debates. They perceived that a new and more radical Marxist approach would soon prevail. Some of them did not agree with this change and there was a pessimistic feeling about it. However, it had to be said that none of them was pressed on to leave because of their ideas.[33]

There were, however, many good achievements that the department could count on. These were recognised by Nyerere himself in his document *Education for Self Reliance*, when he said: "No longer do our children simply learn British and European history. Faster than would have been possible, our University College and other institutions are providing materials on the study of Africa and making them available to our teachers."[34]

The new political order demanded changes to be made in the staff and approach of the department. Towards the end of the 1960s and during the first years of the 1970s most of the members of staff who had contributed to its establishment were gone. In some cases they were replaced by Tanzanian historians others by foreigners. However, they left having established a distinct reputation for the department's work.

In March 1969 Terence Ranger delivered his inaugural lecture before leaving Dar es Salaam. In this lecture entitled "The recovery of African initiative in Tanzanian history" he summarised the work done in the department in the previous years and his projections for the future. This lecture signalled that this was a period of transition between the work done during the 1950s and, what he thought, the direction that African historiography would take.

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[32] Itandala, A.B. *Op.cit.* p. 5.

[33] Interview with J. McCracken. July 7, 1999. Interview with J. Iliffe. July 13, 1999.

[34] Nyerere, J. *Education for self-reliance.* 1967. p. 5.

In the area of pre-colonial history Ranger criticised the way in which Archaeology had been used to explain the African past.

"If one had to say simply what was the most fruitful way to approach the earlier periods of Tanzanian history I think it would be in these terms -people acting in places instead of all those lines on the maps with arrows pointing in every direction to represent the migrations of the Bantu or the Nilotes, the concentration should be on the building up of human societies, the building up of social and political systems in a series of environments. Of course the importance of fresh people moving in with new ideas must not be overlooked. But if one concentrates upon what people do in places and on the challenges places offer to people the sort of account given by Clark and other diffusionist historians begins to look very inadequate and misleading."[35]

As an example of the new approaches introduced in his department Ranger quoted Kimambo's *A political history of the Pare* which was about to be published.

"The problem of explaining resemblances in (African) political units, either at regional or continental level, has to be sought in the needs of creating a centralised political system among agricultural peoples, and the differences in the scale of organisation have to be understood in terms of adjustment both to local environment and to special external factors."[36]

Interpretations of the colonial period had also been under review. In this respect Ranger mentioned the work of other member of the department, John Iliffe, who was also about to publish his book *Tanganyika under German rule.* Talking about his new approach Iliffe said:

"Its chief concern is rather to demonstrate an interplay between European and African initiatives by showing that Africans were not passive objects of colonial rule, unable to influence their fate or to respond rationally to new situations... African response to change cannot longer be described in the negative terms of resistance. Attempts to initiate, accelerate and control change become at least equally important... Colonial rule cannot be seen as a process of European initiative and African response. Instead a very complex pattern emerges, a pattern of local initiatives, and local bargains, an interplay between European and African aims."[37]

Ranger finished his lecture explaining how these new approaches fitted into the wider notion of initiative that had become central to the work of members of the department. In doing so he looked at the issue of initiative within other contexts

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[35] Ranger, T.O. *The recovery of African initiative in Tanzanian history.* 1969. pp.3-4.

[36] Quoted in Ranger, T.O. *Op.cit.* 1969. p.4.

[37] Quoted in Ranger, T.O. *Op.cit.* 1969. pp.10-11.

of historical activity. First, he looked at the notion of initiative within the wider historical tendency that was exemplified in the work of E.P. Thompson:

"A good deal of what I have quoted to you tonight sounds very much like historical work which is not concerned with Africa at all. Indeed. This question of the initiative of apparently passive majorities is at the heart of the most vital contemporary historiography. I would like to take one example, that of E.P. Thompson, whose remarkable book *The making of the English working class* is familiar to our third year students."[38]

The new historiography, however, was still focused on political history. It lacked the sophistication of Thompson's work mainly because it still considered "Africans" as a unified social group. It had not developed forms of understanding the differences within African societies. Ranger was probably aware of this lacking and realised that this historiography was only a first step and that more work needed to be done to achieve a true social history of Africa.

"It is important to assert the significance of African agency but once this assertion has been forcefully made, and especially once it has been widely accepted, its importance begins to diminish and its ambiguities begin to appear. Emphasis upon the African voice, upon the African initiative in the singular is only meaningful when it is opposed to a doctrine which denies any African initiative at all...Sometimes there is so much fan-fare about the recovery of the African voice that we tend to obscure one very important fact -that there are a Babel of African voices."[39]

So one can see how in these final remarks Ranger is looking at both the past and future of history in Africa. He acknowledged the limitations of the approaches adopted so far and tried to point directions in which these approaches could move on.

The history department in Dar es Salaam during the 1960s was certainly one of the most innovative centres of historical research about Africa in the world. How can one explain this extraordinary development?

"Internationally, the Department came to be recognized as a distinct school of historiography. Before the main methodological debate ensued within the department itself, the special mark for the school was its commitment to the 'political philosophy of current African nationalism'. But was this not a fact for the whole nationalist historiography generally? The main difference in this school

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[38] Ranger, T.O. *Op.cit.* 1969. p.11.

[39] *Ibidem.* p.12.

is that it was new and all its members were of the new nationalist enthusiasm; there were no colonial historians to struggle against. But what the critics of the time had not recognized was that the political environment in which the historians were operating did affect their efforts. Tanzanian nationalism was definitively much more radical in terms of wanting to see Africa liberated. Dar es Salaam even before the Arusha Declaration, had already become the centre of political refugees fighting for liberation of their colonised countries. It was a kind of nationalism which was bound to affect those who were participating in the activities of the new nation."[40]

All former members of the department that I spoke to agreed on the fact that Dar es Salaam offered a particularly exciting environment for the production of African history. Kimambò rightly mentioned above the importance of the political scene and reminded us of the specificities of Tanzanian nationalism. It is certainly true to say that, at some levels, Tanzanian nationalism was more radical when compared to West African nationalisms. However, it also lacked the historical background of the latter. West African nationalists were the heirs of an old nationalist ideology that went back to the nineteenth century. This was an ideology that was familiar with historical discourse and was rooted in the traditions of strong and well-established West African states. Tanzanian nationalism was fresh and new and did not have the ideological baggage of a particular historiographical agenda.

The intellectual freshness of Tanzanian nationalism allowed historians in Tanzania to review the idea of African agency and to make a move towards a more socially based history. It created a unique academic environment that was reflected in the work and ideas of historians of the time, who thought of it as one of the most exciting and stimulating periods of their lives.[41] In the words of McCracken: "It was stimulating, of course, because it was terribly new, and we were all terribly new...."[42]

The close relationship that existed between the aims and purposes of nationalist politics and the problems examined by historians soon came under fire. The article of Denon and Kuper published in 1970 was an example of this growing discontent.

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[40] Kimambo, I. *Op.cit.* 1993. p.6.

[41] Interview with J. McCracken. July 7, 1999. Interview with J. Iliffe. July 13, 1999.

[42] Interview with J. McCracken. July 7, 1999.

"...our argument is that the new historiography has adopted the political philosophy of current African nationalism, and has used it to transform the study of African history. That commitment inclines the school towards rhetoric in defence of narrowly selected themes and interpretations, and the stereotyping and total rejection of alternative views. We suggest also that the basic assumption regarding the continuity and impact of national movements is questionable, and is asserted rather than demonstrated. In short, it is ideological history."[43]

As Kimambo said before, this was a problem of most of the historiography of the time. However, this criticism was particularly directed to the Dar es Salaam school precisely because it was the most articulated and visible project to produce what came to be called a "usable past."[44]

By the end of the 1960s Dar es Salaam, Legon, and other African universities had become major centres for research in African history. In doing so they had greatly contributed to the consolidation of the new field by giving it a "natural" space for its development. The next decade, however, would see dramatic changes in African universities, changes that endangered the position of African history in Africa.

B) Liberals, old and new. African history in Cape Town.

The impact of Nationalism in South Africa in the twentieth century was very different from what was noted in Ghana or Tanzania. The decade of the 1960s, inaugurated by Sharpeville and the banning of the ANC and PAC, was a period of factional disputes in the homelands and disorganised opposition. In this context of social and political division, Nationalism was also a divided concept. Afrikaner politicians had adopted a Nationalist stand in their struggle with English-speaking political influence. On the other hand, the ANC and PAC encouraged an ideology of Black Nationalism that was certainly influenced by African nationalism, but unlike this, did not achieve political power.

Under these circumstances, the impact of African Nationalism in South African historiography was bound to be limited. In the words of John Lonsdale:

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[43] Denon, D. & A. Kuper. "Nationalist historians in the search of a nation: the new historiography in Dar es Salaam." *African Affairs*. 69, 1970. p.348.

[44] This notion was formulated some years later by Ranger, but it was already at the core of the philosophy of historians of the 1960s.

"South African historiography had what was virtually a lost generation in the 1960s; the 'Africanist' or nationalist historians who elsewhere began to re-write the history of independent tropical Africa."[45]

The political establishment in South Africa could not regard the introduction of African history with ease, as this was so intimately linked to the values of African Nationalism. The intellectual climate of the country was generally subdued and many intellectuals who were against the current state of affairs decided to leave. In these conditions, the introduction and development of the new field of African history was negatively affected.[46]

Despite these difficulties, the new historiography did have a limited impact on South African historians, particularly among young liberals. So far, Liberal historiography had paid little attention to issues of African agency in South African history, with the exception of Macmillan and De Kiewiet. However, their political position against racial segregation made them receptive to the new historiography and allowed many of them to transform the liberal approach to history.

"Those who in the 1960s and 1970s carried further the liberal tradition of South African historical writing initiated by Macmillan and De Kiewiet have sometimes been called 'later liberals' or 'neo-liberals.' But as their chief contribution lay in their Africanist perspective, 'liberal Africanist', which is the label some of them use for themselves, would indeed seem the most appropriate term."[47]

Some of these "liberal Africanists" were working at the University of Cape Town. Previously, as has been mentioned, a group of academics had presented a memorandum entitled "The Expansion of African Studies" which achieved a favourable response. Unfortunately, the proposals were not all followed up and the general situation of African Studies in UCT experienced little change.

The history department, however, did manage to introduce some new developments. Particularly important was the introduction of a course on African History. Unfortunately, one of the characteristics of the study of African history at

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[45] Lonsdale, J. "From colony to industrial state: South African historiography as seen from England" in *Social Dynamics*. 9,(1), 1983. p. 70.

[46] Bozzoli, B. and P. Delius. "Radical history and Southern African society" in *Radical History Review*. 46/47, 1990. p. 17.

[47] Saunders, C.C. *The making of the South African past*. 1988. p. 143.

UCT was that it was "institutionally" separated from the area of African Studies. Despite the co-operation between members of the School of African Studies and the history department, the few changes made in the history department had almost no impact on the status of African Studies in the University as a whole.

Leonard Thompson, head of the history department, was strongly influenced by the new approaches to history. Unfortunately, he would soon join the group of intellectuals who left South Africa. His expertise on South African history and his newly adopted approaches made him a valuable asset and soon he received an offer to join the University of California in Los Angeles. His decision to leave was prompted by his disappointment with the general state of affairs in the country. Before leaving he said to an audience that the situation in the country after Sharpeville "make it difficult, if not impossible, for me to continue my work properly."[48] In UCLA, Thompson pursued even further the new approaches on African history and tried to apply them to South Africa. He collaborated with anthropologists and linguists and started a biography of Moshoeshoe of Lesotho in which he used oral material together with written sources.

The running of the department was taken over by Eric Axelson, a historian of Portuguese Africa. During his time at UCT Axelson excelled as an administrator and soon became Dean of the Faculty of Arts. The first problem he faced was again the one of staffing. The poor staffing situation described before continued to be a problem during the 1960s. In 1964 the establishment was made up of one professor, one senior lecturer, three lecturers, and two junior lecturers; while the number of students in the department had been increasing[49] and the money allocated to the department had remained unchanged since 1960.[50]

The possibilities for expansion under these circumstances were limited. However, Axelson managed to use these resources to introduce some changes in the department. His first move was to propose the abandonment of Constitutional Law by the department of history. He argued that the teaching of Constitutional Law

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[48] Quoted in *Ibidem.* p. 146.

[49] E. Axelson to the Dean of the Faculty of Arts. September 17, 1964. Minute October 6, 1964. *Minutes of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* UCT.

[50] E. Axelson to the Dean of the Faculty of Arts. October 1, 1964. Minute September 29, 1964. *Minutes of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* UCT.

had been initiated under the headship of Prof. Mandelbrote and since his retirement nobody had been able to teach the course. Besides, Axelson added, the course was more suited for the Law Faculty than the history department.[51]

Axelson's recommendation, however, had an ulterior motive. The cancellation of Constitutional Law in the department would allow the introduction of a course in African History, and a proposal in this direction soon followed. After underlining the fact that no attention was given in the syllabus to African history Axelson said:

"There is always a compelling need for an intensive study of the history of ones one region and continent. There is still greater need today for a study of African history, in view of the emergence of new states, with emphasis on nationalistic interpretations of history, and growing international interest in the continent which is marked by the creation of special schools for the study of African history in Europe, Asia and America."[52]

Axelson went on to clarify that the introduction of this new course would not involve any increase of staff in the department if Constitutional Law were effectively abandoned.[53] Both proposals were finally approved in October 1963 subject to funds, and the course was scheduled to appear in 1964.[54]

Axelson's efforts to promote the study of African history in UCT did not end there. By 1969 he was making plans to increase the teaching of African history from one to two courses and to provide funds for more doctoral research.[55] A year later the Economic history department also presented proposals to introduce a course on African Economic History.[56]

The introduction of these courses, however, did not have an immediate impact on the production of history at UCT. Research in the department continued to be

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[51] Axelson, E. "Proposed abandonment by the department of history of the teaching of Constitutional Law." March 8, 1963. Minute March 12, 1963. *Minutes of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* UCT.

[52] Axelson, E. "Proposed establishment of a course in African history". March 8,1963. Minute March 12, 1963. *Minutes of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* UCT.

[53] *Ibidem.*

[54] Minute October 8, 1963. *Minutes of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* UCT.

[55] Axelson, E. "Five Year Plan. History" Minute October 7, 1969. *Minutes of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* UCT.

[56] "Economic history revision of syllabuses and introduction of a course in African Economic history." Minute July 28, 1970. *Minutes of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* UCT.

focused on South African history and even in this area there was little change in the approaches adopted. Dr. Van del Poel continued her work on the Smuts Papers, G.B. Nourse was researching on South Africa and the League of Nations and A.M. Davey was working on Pro-Boer movements in Great Britain and Ireland. There was little postgraduate work and this also tended to focus on South African history. Some examples of doctoral theses were: "A history of the South African Labour Party" by D. Ticktin and "The Conciliation movement in the Cape Colony, 1899-1902" by T. Botma. Two other theses dealt with the 1913 Native Land Act and one with the establishment of German rule in South West Africa.[57]

Even Axelson's work was very much focused on the European participation in Africa, rather than the agency of Africans. His book *Portuguese in South East Africa 1600-1700* published in 1960 was a detailed outline of Portuguese activities in south-east Africa, mainly concerned with the decline of Portuguese power during the seventeenth century. His conclusions paid little attention to the issue of African agency. His interpretation of native participation was that of "passive recipients" of Portuguese will.[58] In Axelson's opinion the decline of the Portuguese Empire in Africa could be explained by a lack of co-ordination in the government and general corruption.

"Within the captaincy of Moçambique, the main reason for Portugal's set-back was failure to resolve the problems of government. The captain or governor was often completely unsuited for the post, his appointment resting sometimes on a royal mercy to himself or a relative, but more often on purchase, with personal wealth the main qualification...Once appointed, the captain or local governor customarily devoted his energies and resources more to exploiting his monopoly of the trade of the Zambezi than to carrying out the royal policy for the welfare of the region (which was often enlightened). It was the cupitity of these men that undermined Portugal's position in south-east Africa."[59]

Notwithstanding the limitations of his own work, Axelson had plans to produce a new survey work to replace the *Cambridge History of South Africa.* In 1962, having taken charge of the history department at UCT, he contacted J.S. Marais at Wits University to propose him to act as co-editor. However, later that year Axelson was informed by Oxford University Press and by Marais, that Thompson

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[57] UCT. *Report of Publications and Research in the University.* 1965-67. p.7. UCT. *Ibidem.* 1968-70. pp.4-5.

[58] Axelson, E. *Portuguese in South East Africa, 1600-1700.* 1960. p. 194.

[59] *Ibidem.* p.192.

had already secured support from Clarendon Press to publish a two-volume history of South Africa. This cancelled Axelson's project.[60]

It is probably fair to assume that Thompson's exclusion of Axelson and other South African historians from his project is revealing of his disillusionment with South African historiography. However, the project was not completely deprived of South African academics. The distinguished liberal anthropologist Monica Wilson from the School of African Studies acted as co-editor.

Wilson had also been strongly influenced by the new historiography emerging north of the Limpopo. In the winter of 1963-64 she spent some time as visiting lecturer in the University of California in Los Angeles and travelling in the United States. This period gave her insights on the development of African studies and also allowed her to reflect on her ideas on Nguni history.[61] She was strongly impressed by the development of African Studies in the United States and in this respect she wrote:

"The increase in interest and knowledge in this field since 1950 is spectacular... It is a bitter tragedy that South African universities are cut off from direct access to this sort of awareness through the exclusion of students and visitors from other parts of Africa."[62]

Prompted by this experience Wilson renewed her contacts with Thompson while she was in California. Together they started the planning of the new history of South Africa. The final product of this project was finally published in 1970 as the *Oxford History of South Africa.* Unfortunately, the potential impact and influence of the work were undermined by the fierce criticism it encountered. By 1970 the tradition that fed into its production was already being replaced by new approaches to the study of Africa in general and South Africa in particular. South African historiography was quickly moving towards a radical approach that would revolutionise the whole field of African history.

It is important, however, to reflect on the significance of this work in the context of liberal historiography in South Africa. The *Oxford History* clearly represented

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[60] Saunders, C.C. *Op.cit.* 1988. p. 147.

[61] Wilson, M. "Report on Special Leave" Minute August 4, 1964. *Minutes of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* UCT.

[62] *Ibidem.*

the shift of approach experienced by some liberal academics in South Africa. They criticised previous approaches that had failed to look at the experience of "non-white" peoples and to integrate it as an active agent of South African history. In their view, this was not only an error of interpretation; it also had tragic political consequences:

"In a rigidly stratified society historical writing (or historical tradition orally transmitted) is not merely a reflection of social inequality; it is also a powerful instrument for the maintenance of inequality. This is certainly the case in South Africa, where much historical writing promotes the perpetuation of language and race barriers, and some of it does it intentionally."[63]

They also criticised the narrow disciplinary focus that characterised historical writing in South Africa and praised, for example, the work of C.W. de Kiewiet for having been able to move beyond this restriction. Despite this, the editors concluded: "But the focus of his book is on the growth of the modern sector of the South African economy; and, as its title indicates, it is scarcely concerned with the political aspect."[64] The traditionally liberal belief on the centrality of politics in the historical process is revealed in this comment; and one also should remember that the new history of Africa was firmly articulated around the study of political processes. So despite the attempt to produce an interdisciplinary history of South Africa the focused remained on the political. Macmillan and de Kiewiet and their economic approaches would have to wait (not much longer though) to be incorporated in the study of the South African past.

The *Oxford History* represented the new "liberal-Africanist" tendency in South African history. It also showed the coincidence of interests between Africanist and liberal tendencies. Both gave particular importance to political history and both had as its main aim the reassessment of African agency in historical writing. This showed that, despite the continuous attempts to separate the interpretation of the South African past from that of the rest of the continent, South African history could be somehow studied within the context of African history. This was, probably, the most important contribution of the so-called "liberal-Africanists" and the *Oxford History*.

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[63] Wilson, M. and L. Thompson. (eds.) *The Oxford History of South Africa.* 1969. p. vi.

[64] *Ibidem.* p. vii.

The work however, also reflected a division among South African historians. This was not only the obvious one between Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking historians, but also among liberals. This was proven when so few historians were called to collaborate in the project. As Saunders said: "that so many non-historians were involved was in part a reflection of the editors' wish to be interdisciplinary in approach, but it was also a commentary on the state of history at the time."[65] It was true that few historians in South Africa were qualified to write about economic or social history, but one can also say that few historians in England or Africa had these qualifications, and in fact, little historical work of this period is about social or economic history. So, the fact that few historians were involved is probably more related to the fact that few historians in South Africa were concerned with the problem of African agency, and shows that the liberal tradition had not yet fully embraced the new African history and was still in the process of changing its perspective. The slowness of this process was illustrated in the case of the history department at UCT.

One can conclude that the *Oxford History* was representative of a slow-changing liberal tradition. However, by 1969 a new and radical perspective was beginning to dominate South African historiography and the "new history" of the 1950s and 1960s was coming under attack. Unfortunately, the project of Wilson and Thompson was obsolete almost at its inception. Its objective, the integration of African agency and the elimination of a number of myths from South African history, was an old-fashioned agenda by 1969.

Despite this, the impact of the new historiography had an important outcome. Young South African historians influenced by the new ideas decided to leave South Africa to pursue the new approach. Some of these students, such as Shula Marks and Antony Atmore went to London, to the School of Oriental and African Studies. From there they embarked in studies of African resistance and colonial rule, and later encouraged the emergence of the new radical school.[66]

The case of the *Oxford History* and the situation in the history department of UCT illustrate the slowness of the new historiography to impact South African history.

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[65] Saunders, C.C. *Op.cit.* 1988. p. 155.

[66] Bozzoli, B. and P. Delius. *Op.cit.* 1990. p.18.

By contrast, it also shows how important Nationalism, as a political ideology and social project, was for the development of African history. The 1970s would see a revolution in South African history that will extend to other areas of the continent.

C) SOAS, the golden years.

By the 1960s SOAS had become the main centre for the training of future historians of Africa. The role of SOAS in this respect was clear; however, the survival of African history at SOAS depended also in its success at justifying its existence within the context of the British education system. This became a new challenge in the 1960s.

Towards the end of the 1950s SOAS had experienced a considerable expansion as a result of the support derived from the Scarbrough report. This expansion in staff and teaching had not been accompanied by an increase in undergraduate enrolment. This was a serious concern as was reflected in the words of the director of the School, Cyril Philips:

"We are all of the opinion with Sir Ralph Turner who spoke on this matter last year, that our immediate need, following a large and even breathtaking expansion of staff within the past decade, is to take a fresh look at ourselves, to discover what we are and why we are, to see where we fit in as a College of the University and as an integral part of the educational system of this country."[67]

This quest for self-definition reflected an institutional concern with the relevance of African and Asian studies within the British educational system. In the era of African independence and the context of the cold war this was not too difficult. One has to remember that the initial introduction of African Studies in Britain followed a need to establish new relations between Britain and its colonies. After most of those colonies achieved independence, the necessity became even more pressing.

Government interest in the continued development of African and Asian studies was reflected in the publication and recommendations of two reports. The Hayter

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[67] Philips, C. "Director's Review" in SOAS *Report of the Governing Body, Statement of Accounts, and Departmental Reports*. 1957-58. pp. 74-75.

Report in 1961 and the Robbins Report in 1963. The first document reviewed the progress achieved since the recommendations of the Scarbrough Report were implemented. It recommended the strengthening of teaching and research, particularly in the area of modern studies. The report highlighted the role of the School of Oriental and African studies as a pioneer in these fields, and its efforts to promote them among grammar schools and other universities. Finally, the report emphasised the need to attract more British students to the study of Africa and Asia.[68] The support granted by the Hayter Report to SOAS at a time of tight finances in the University of London, were proof of the importance these studies had achieved.

The recommendations of the Hayter Report were also instrumental in the creation of other centres for the study of Asia and Africa such as those that were created in Hull, Leeds and Sheffield for Asian studies and the Centre of West African Studies at Birmingham. Two years later, the Robbins Report went one step further when it recommended the introduction of undergraduate and Master courses related to Africa and Asia. SOAS had already taken steps to introduce such courses and the publication of the Report was a reinforcement of its commitment to this new endeavour. This expansion proved to be instrumental in attracting higher numbers of British students.[69]

Within this climate of ideas, towards the end of the 1950s, Oliver and his colleagues were planning the introduction of a BA honours program with special reference to the history of Africa.[70] The discussions that resulted in the introduction of this new course illustrate the scepticism about the relevance of African studies for British students. But more importantly, they also show that, despite such attitudes, there was enough support from the higher levels of government to push for this expansion. In his recollections of the time, Oliver remembers a conversation with Lillian Penson a former chair of the History Board, former vice-chancellor of the University and a member of the Inter-University

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[68] SOAS. *Report of the Governing Body, Statement of Accounts, and Departmental Reports.* 1961-62. pp.31-32.

[69] Philips, C. *The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London: 1917-1967.* [n.d.].p.59.

[70] Oliver, R. *In the Realms of gold.* 1997. p.245.

Council of Higher Education Overseas. As Oliver said, "If she spoke against me, many would surely follow."[71]

"Bernard Lewis, who was now head of my department, strongly advised me to go and see her and ask for her support. I did so, and it did not seem to go at all well. 'Young man' she said, 'now that Doctor Nkrumah is not in the room with us for once, let me tell you...' And what she told me was, in effect, that while African history might be all right for the Africans, it was certainly not all right for the British. I have often thought about this encounter, and it seems to me in retrospect that what she was expressing was the residual prejudice of most of the generation older than mine."[72]

In the end, the Board of studies in history approved Oliver's proposal without Penson speaking against it. The incident was certainly an example of the hesitations of some members of the "old guard" regarding the introduction of African history in British education. However, it highlights the general positive attitude to this development.

With the approval of the History Board, Oliver and his colleagues got down to the practical details of organising the new BA honours course. Their main challenge and concern was the securing of qualified staff. At that stage the history department had three specialists on African history: Oliver, Douglas Jones and the recently hired John Fage. The smooth running of the course, however, would require at least another two positions. Oliver managed to secure a fourth position for Richard Gray, a former research student at SOAS who was at that time teaching in the University of Khartoum. But by the time Gray joined the department he ended up replacing Fage who moved to chair the recently created Centre of West African Studies at Birmingham.[73] The staffing situation in the department improved during the decade. Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore, two former students of Thompson in South Africa joined the teaching staff in 1963. Humphrey Fisher arrived in 1964 to develop the study of Islam in Africa. In 1967 the study of Portuguese Africa was taken up by David Birmingham who was a former student from Legon and SOAS. Finally, Richard Rathbone, also a graduate student from SOAS joined the department in 1969 to take charge of XXth century history. In short, by the end of the decade, the department had eight specialists

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[71] *Ibidem.* p.246.

[72] *Ibidem.*

[73] *Ibidem.* p.245-246.

on African history,[74] three more than Oliver had initially aimed for. Five of them were graduates from SOAS, which shows the crucial role of the institution in the training of a generation of specialist in African history.

The establishment of the BA honours course was significant because of the opportunity it gave to the history department to expand the area of African history. The increase in numbers of staff also produced an improvement and expansion of research. There was no doubt that African history in SOAS was finally firmly established, and its aims were not directed anymore only to the training of potential teachers in African colleges. Following the policies of the School, Oliver formulated the objectives of the department and the relevance of African history within a British environment:

"I concluded by saying that I had two distinct ambitions for our teaching of African history at SOAS. 'The first is that our undergraduate school shall attract sufficient number of British students to make some contribution to what our American colleagues describe as "globalisation of history." Because, call it what you like, there is no doubt in my mind that this is the next great stride which historical education has somehow got to accomplish, in this country as in others. And my second ambition is that our postgraduate school should remain, as I believe it is now, almost wholly cosmopolitan, a group in which Africans and Americans, Asians and Europeans can feel completely at one on the study of man in Africa.'"[75]

It is important to emphasise once more the importance of undergraduate teaching in the development of African history in Britain. This "globalisation of history" that Oliver mentioned was certainly a first step to be achieved if African history was to be granted a long-term place in British education. To a great extent, the good health and positive expansion of postgraduate and professional research depended on African history securing a strong position in undergraduate teaching.

Postgraduate research continued to flourish at SOAS. Between 1958 and 1968 the history department took eighteen African students, nine Americans, eight British, three Canadians and one Guyanan. From these, all but one of the African students returned to university appointments in their own countries. Twelve from the non-African students also took positions in Africa and eight of the nine Americans

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[74] *Ibidem.* p. 25.

[75] *Ibidem.* p.292.

students returned to the United States.[76] With this output of professional historians, SOAS, by the end of the 1960s was certainly the main centre of research and training in African history. Without any doubt, this achievement was the most important contribution of SOAS to the consolidation and development of the new field.

Students at SOAS faced numerous limitations, particularly of time and funding. However, they also had the advantage of having rich archival resources at their doorstep and abundant library resources. For these reasons, most students mainly worked on archival sources, both in Britain and Africa. However, there were also many students who did research on oral sources.

Oliver was determined to give students a sound training in source criticism. One should remember that the "globalisation of history" to which Oliver aspired implied the establishment of African history on an equal basis to other areas of historical research. Oliver was a pragmatist, and he knew that the future of the field and much of its credibility depended on their ability to produce historians whose standards were widely recognised by the academic community. The creation of a firm methodological and empirical foundation was central to this aim. In the International Congress of African Historians held at the University College, Dar es Salaam in 1965, Oliver looked at the diverse sources that could be used for the reconstruction of African history.[77] Oliver looked at the potential contributions of such disciplines as Linguistics, Archaeology and Botany, but concluded that the historian could only profit from these fields when their interests coincided, and that historians had, in the whole, little control on the research priorities of linguists and archaeologists.[78] "This leaves" -Oliver continued- "two principal kinds of evidence which historians can and must themselves supply the momentum in basic research. One is written evidence, the other is oral tradition."[79] In his opinion, historians based in Western institutions could make important contributions to the study of written evidence, and African

[76] Oliver, R. "African history: SOAS and beyond" in Kirk-Greene, A.H.M. (ed.) *The emergence of African history at British universities*. 1995. p.27.

[77] Oliver, R. "Western historiography and its relevance to Africa" in Ranger, T.O. (ed.) *Emerging themes of African history*. 1968.pp. 58-60.

[78] *Ibidem*. pp.58-59.

[79] *Ibidem*. p.59.

historians could profit from their proximity to the sources to exploit oral research.

"There remains the question of how far historians from western countries are making, or likely to make, any significant contribution to basic research in oral tradition. At first sight it may seem that this is a matter about which much is said at conferences, but about which little is being done. It may even be asked whether western historians have not been guilty of diverting a whole generation of African research students from the work which they should have been doing. Let me say at once that I have never diverted any research student from working on oral tradition -I have always encouraged it, but only three individuals have ever proposed to me that they should work mainly in this field, and I expect that this is also the experience of others like myself. Nor would I accept the proposition that a research student who trains in documentary research is unfitting himself for later work in oral tradition. The whole lesson of Vansina's methodology of oral tradition is surely that the same canons of judgement apply in both fields."[80]

Oliver's defence of the importance of documentary research for African history reveals the practical limitations of some students at SOAS. He was convinced, though, that students should have a solid training in source criticism whichever the nature of that source. He and his colleagues were aware that in a field in such a need for empirical research there was room for both archival and oral research. And they knew that a solid training in source criticism was the first step to be taken in both cases. SOAS inclination towards archival research has been attributed to its colonial influence. In my opinion, however, it was more a matter of resources. Despite the support granted by the government, this was not at the level that we will see in the United States, where there were numerous opportunities for fieldwork funding and the duration of courses was not so restricted.

Despite these limitations, the 1960s were a golden age in the history of African history at SOAS. Many of the most important historians of the next decade were trained there and contributed in the consolidation of African history in other areas of the world. SOAS experience shows the determination of the Government to support African studies at a number of levels, despite the existing scepticism from some members of the academic establishment.

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[80] *Ibidem.* p.60.

D) African Studies in the United States.

American universities, as their British counterparts, needed to define the relevance of the study of Africa if they were to ensure the long-term survival of the field. This was successfully achieved during the 1960s due to the conjuncture of events in Africa and the eruption of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.

The independence of African countries radically modified the outlook of world-politics. After World War II, the United States had emerged as a major player in this new geo-political scene. On the eve of the Cold War the United States government was aware of the importance of extending its zones of influence. The newly independent territories offered the opportunity to do so. In this climate, increased knowledge of areas like Africa and Asia became more important in political and economic terms and reinforced the conviction of the United States Government of the need to support the development of International Studies in general.

In addition to this, between 1960 and 1966 Americans saw the escalation of the Black protest movement. Together these had a positive effect on the consolidation of African-American studies.

"The score years beginning in 1960 witnessed an enormous scholarly output in the history of race relations and the Afro-American experience. There was a quickening in publication in the early 1960s, and by the end of the decade Afro-American history had become fashionable, a "hot" subject finally legitimated as a scholarly speciality."[81]

The consolidation of African-American studies did much to raise the profile of African Studies and African history. Unfortunately, as it will be seen later, tensions between both fields became a characteristic of American academia and prevented further co-operation among them.

It was crucial for African studies that the higher education system in the United States went through a significant period of expansion during the 1960s. This

[81] Meier, A. and E. Rudwick. *Black history and the historical profession, 1915-1980.* 1986. p. 161.

made it possible for an emerging field such as African studies to compete within the University establishment.

Before going into the analysis of the development of African history in specific American institutions, it is worth looking at the general outlook of African studies in the United States. In 1967 Gwendolen Carter from Northwestern University prepared a report for the Department of Health and Education and Welfare on the development of African Studies in the United States.

"African studies programs in the United States have expanded rapidly, particularly in the last decade, in spite of the fact that widespread and intensive concern for Africa developed later than did attention to Latin American and Asian studies. There are now some forty formally organized African studies units in American universities and colleges and twenty-two of them at major centers. In 1966 these later units (of which the first was established at Northwestern University in 1948, followed by Boston University and UCLA) included 260 faculty members with African specialization and 1000 graduate students who were combing their disciplinary specialization with commitments to the African area."[82]

This successful expansion of the field was greatly helped by the contribution of private foundations such as Carnegie and Ford. However, by the end of the decade the support of these and the government was shifting towards specific projects rather than program development. In this context, Carter warned "the flexibility that has been perhaps the most significant factor in the impressive growth of African studies is being imperilled."[83] The significance of this comment lies on the fact that in fact, despite the strong support of private foundations and government, academics interested in Africa had been relatively free to pursue their own ideas and interests, and this had allowed a considerable expansion of the field despite the particular interests of Government.

Also in this report Carter predicted the need for even more trained specialists on Africa, such as teachers for colleges and highschools, specialists on education, government (Foreign Service) research, service agencies, business, commerce and

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[82] Carter, Gwendolen. "African Studies in the United States. Report for Dr. Miller, Department of Health, Education and Welfare." [May, 1967]. p.2. *Program of African Studies Records*. NUA.

[83] *Ibidem*. p.3.

journalism. Her reasons to expect such a high demand of manpower are revealing of the arguments in favour of African studies in the United States:[84]

"Particular reasons for expecting interest in a demand for African studies to continue and expand are (1) the particular relation of a substantial proportion of our population, the Afro-Americans, to Africa and the need for all Americans to be better informed about the African heritage and Africa's contemporary characteristics, (2) the comparative neglect of African studies until the last decade (3) Africa's potential resources and need for development, (4) Africa's size and immense variety."[85]

All these reasons were in favour of the development of African studies in the United States, but not all of them dictated what academics actually did in the area of African studies. It will be seen later that issues of social and political development were among the areas that attracted much research from American scholars. However, the study of African-American populations and their cultural and social links to Africa were rarely discussed in the context of African Studies. This created a paradox in which the presence of an American population of African descent was used as a justification for African Studies, but this was not reflected in the concerns of the field. The importance of this situation in the American context finally became apparent towards the end of the decade during the annual meeting of the American African Studies Association in Montreal, 1969.

The African Studies Association (ASA) was originally set up in 1957 and held its first meeting in the Evanston campus at Northwestern University in 1958. It was largely an initiative by Melville Herskovits and other scholars interested in Africa. Towards the end of the 1960s the ASA was a consolidated and growing organisation that reflected the successful development of African studies in the country. Its membership went from 1346 in 1965 to 2438 in 1969.[86] An association of this size had already considerable influence on the direction of the

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[84] It is also important to highlight the role of the Peace Corps. Many students became interested on Africa through their experiences with the Peace Corps and others went back to work with them after their studies. The Corps were also a source of recruitment for the Foreign Service and NGOs.

[85] *Ibidem.* p.11.

[86] Executive Secretary's Report Board Meeting, October 27, 1965. ASA. *Board of Directors Records.* NU. Africana Library. Board Meeting Minute. May 2-4, 1969. ASA. *Board of Directors Records.* NU. Africana Library.

field. Given the high profile that the ASA and its annual meeting acquired among Africanists, it is not surprising that the debate came to the surface there.

During the ASA meeting in Montreal, 1969 both morning and evening plenary sessions were interrupted by demands of members of the African Heritage Studies Association. A full statement of their demands can be found in Appendix I. The main request was for a change of the 'ideological' bases of the organisation, which were perceived as supportive of colonialist and neo-colonialist views of Africa. This was to be changed for a Pan-Africanist perspective by which all Black people were considered African peoples. A second element of these demands was the change in the structure of ASA itself. "African peoples", as were referred to in the statement, were not properly represented in the decision-making bodies of the organisation and some specific measures should be taken to correct this lacking. A third and final element that should not be overlooked is the demand for ASA to take a more active role in specific cases where African peoples were being mistreated.[87]

The debate was continued the next day at the Business Meeting. Not surprisingly, the point that was more heatedly discussed was the one that demanded the Board to be composed by six Africans and six Europeans. The request was presented as a motion that was finally voted down by a narrow margin.[88] This upset the members of the AHSA who immediately left the room without waiting for further discussions. The meeting continued and the Fellows of the Association immediately adopted a motion presented by Fred Burke. The main points of this proposal can be found in Appendix II. The proposal focused on the issue of reviewing the constitution of ASA. It proposed the appointment of a committee of thirty members of which fifteen would be Black scholars. The important break-through was that all members of ASA, and even all those attending that conference, could present nominations and vote for members of the committee. The AHSA eventually accepted this motion provided that the 15 Black members were appointed by this organisation. The ASA accepted this condition and the process was set in motion and the debate continued in following months.

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[87] *African Studies Newsletter*. II, (6-7), 1969.

[88] *Ibidem*. p.3. It is important to remember that, at this point the ASA constitution did not allow all members of the Association to vote on policy-making decisions. Only Fellows of the Association were allowed this privilege.

It is important to state that the conflict that surfaced in Montreal had a history behind it. The tension between African-American academics and the "white" establishment, which dominated the field of African studies, went back to the early stages of its development. Talking about the events in Montreal John Henrick Clark, president of the AHSA said:

"The confrontation and the conflict that I am referring did not start at Montreal. For over ten years, black scholars interested in African studies have questioned white academic domination over this area of study. Black scholars were pioneers in this field and their interest and work goes back to the early part of the nineteenth century."[89]

In 1968, during the Eleventh Annual Meeting of ASA in Los Angeles a Black Caucus was formed and issued a statement in which the Caucus "charged the Association with taking the steps necessary to immediately broaden Black participation in all phases of the Association operations."[90] The ASA had recently established a Committee on Afro-American Issues to address these concerns. It was obvious a year later that the efforts of this committee had not been enough to satisfy the demands of the members of the Black Caucus.

Looking back at the conflict one can see that the issue of representation was central. In Curtin's estimates (which should be taken just as estimates) the participation of African-Americans in the new wave of African studies that emerged during the 1950s was reduced to between 4 and 6 %.[91] For the 1960s Curtin estimates that the proportion went up together with the general participation in the field. In his opinion it could have gone up to 10 or 15 %, although he admitted this is nothing but a guess based in his impressions.[92] Even as estimates these figures show a clear domination of the field by white scholars. The under-representation of Black scholars in the field of African studies was

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[89] Clarke, J.H. "Confrontation in Montreal. Report presented by John Henrick Clark, President, African Heritage Studies Association" in *African Studies Newsletter.* II, (6-7), 1969.

[90] ASA Committee on Afro-American Issues. "Reports on its first year of work" in *African Studies Newsletter.* II, (6-7). 1969. p 4.

[91] Curtin, P. "African studies, a personal assessment." In *African Studies Review.* XIV, (3). 1971. p.362. Curtin's estimates were based in the numbers of Fellows of the African Studies Association in 1958 and the a sample of grant recipients of the program of Ford Foreign Area Fellowships up to 1958. One should also be careful to remember that much of the writing on Africa before the 1950s was done by African-Americans working in the margins of academic activity. It is possible that Curtin did not take this work into account for his estimations.

[92] *Ibidem.* p.363.

obviously the result of years of segregation in the American education system. More profoundly, however, it reveals an ideological split between scholars whose interest in Africa came from their experience as part of the African-American community, and those who started their work on Africa as a result of the political and social changes of the 1950s and 1960s.

In the aftermath of the conflict, many saw it as an attempt to racially define the new field.[93] However, the issues of representation and ideology were closely related, and this gave the conflict a strong political tone. In the words of one president of the Association the issue at stake was "ultimately political control of the Association for whatever apparent advantages were there to be had in gaining that control."[94] Such advantages are obvious. Political control of the association would allow the encouragement of the ideological views of the AHSA. These included not only the adoption of a Pan-Africanist perspective, but also a more militant involvement of the Association in social and political matters. Referring specifically to the role of history Clark said: "History, properly understood and utilized, is power -a force of liberation of slavery depending in how it is used or misused. We remain strangers to the people who have been the instruments of our oppression. In the general sense, true African history and African historians are unknown to them."[95] Clark underlined here the contradiction of having the study of Africa largely being justified on the existence of an African-American population, and the real separation between scholars and the problems of that community. He was asking for the study of Africa to become really relevant to Africans wherever they happened to live.

In the months that followed the conference negotiations continued between the two associations. However, these were eventually broken and the links between the two were severed. There were changes in the organisation of ASA, the College of Fellows was finally eliminated and a new constitution was adopted. In the longer run the conflict had a significant impact in the direction of debates in the

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[93] One can see many of such opinions in a number of letters sent to ASA after the Conference. These were published in *African Studies Newsletter*. II, (6-7), 1969.

[94] Cowan, L.G.. "Presidents Report". In *African Studies Review*. XIII, (3), 1970. p.344.

[95] Clark, J.H. "The African Heritage Studies Association (AHSA): Some notes on the conflict with the African Studies Association (ASA) and the fight to reclaim African history." in *Issue*. VI, (Summer/Fall), 1976. p.10.

field of African Studies. "One of the main results of the Montreal protest was to intensify the debate about politics -or non-politics- of the association."[96] The following decade saw extensive discussion where the Association tried to clarify its position in terms of politics and government. The problem unleashed by the Montreal events, however, went beyond the mere clarification of the ASA position. It opened the wider question of the relevance of African studies in the American context and uncovered the existing tension between two diverging approaches to the study of Africa. These questions have remained at the core of African studies ever since and, as it will be seen, had shaped its development up to the present.

African history was not exempt from these contradictions. Historians of Africa in the United States approached their research in a very similar way to their counterparts in Europe and Africa. In the course of the decade, however, particular characteristics started to develop as more historians were trained in American universities. There were two general trends in the institutional development of African history. First, within the general expansion of African studies, the discipline of history did register a significant growth. It went from being 12.7 % by 1960 to 19.6 % in 1970.[97] The percentage of Anthropologists, in contrast, fell from 28.6 to 15.5. Political science, traditionally the most popular discipline remained fairly stable going from 23 % to 21.5 %.

The modest increase in the numbers of historians of Africa reveals an improvement in the provision of history in American institutions. This, however, does not mean that the situation of African history during the 1960s was ideal. There was a significant lack of qualified staff in many areas of African Studies, but the strong demand from students to go into history made the shortage more acute for history departments. The staffing of African Studies programs during the 1950s was achieved through the conversion of scholars from other fields to the study of Africa. Such was the case of people like Phillip Curtin and Gwendolen Carter who were later called "retreads."[98] The expansion of the 1960s required

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[96] Robinson, D. "The African Studies Association at Age 35: Presidential Address to the 1993 African Studies Association Annual Meeting." In *African Studies Review*. 37, (2). 1994. p. 2.

[97] Curtin, P. *Op.cit.* 1971.p.359. These figures should also be taken as approximations. However, they seem reasonable when seen under the light the development of African history in particular institutions.

[98] Hadsel, F.L. "American scholarship in Africa, 1950-1970: Origins, influences, highlights". Paper presented at the ASA Annual Meeting, October, 1989. p.8.

more than the American system had been able to produce. In this context, there was a need to attract European scholars to fill the positions opened by the large expansion of African studies. This was particularly common in the field of history, where, according to an informal survey done in 1969 revealed that more than 80% of the Professorships in African history were held by staff recruited overseas.[99] These trends will be better appreciated in the cases of Northwestern and Wisconsin.

E) African history in Northwestern and Wisconsin.

The Program of African Studies (PAS) at Northwestern continued to grow during the 1960s. Support from the Ford Foundation was renewed in 1961 for a ten-year period after which the University would assume the responsibility for it.[100] This new grant allowed the Program to expand and reinforce its staff and courses. In 1964 the Program celebrated two significant additions. First, the arrival of Professor Gwendolen Carter as the new Director of the Program. Second the establishment of the Department of Linguistics (formerly called African Languages and Linguistics). The latter development enhanced the PAS position and it allowed it to be appointed Language and Area Centre of the Office of Education in 1965. This appointment made PAS eligible to additional economic support from the Office of Education. Although much of these funds were aimed to language training, other areas benefited from it. History students, for example, who needed to learn an African language for their research made good use of this support.

The new director was also good news for the expansion of the Program. Gwendolen Carter was originally from Canada and first went to the United States to do graduate work in Radcliffe, where she was granted a PhD in Political Science in 1938. Before moving to Northwestern in 1964, she was appointed Sophia Smith Professor at Smith College in 1961. Her early work focused on European governments. Her first book, *The British Commonwealth and International Security* was published in 1947. In 1948 Carter visited Africa and the interest in

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[99] Curtin, P. *Op.cit.* p.362. One has to compare this with places like Legon and SOAS where recruitment was already being done among their own undergraduate and graduate students.

[100] Payson S. Wild [Vice-President and Dean of Faculties, NU.] to Melville Fox.[Ford Foundation] May 17, 1960. *Melville Herskovits Papers.* NUA. And Melvin Fox to Payson S. Wild. December 27, 1960. *Melville Herskovits Papers.* NUA.

the continent immediately sparked. She later concentrated in South African politics and visited that country for a year of research in 1952. Carter's correspondence from 1963 to 1974 is kept in the Records of the Program of African Studies. It shows a significant commitment to the expansion and consolidation of the program. She is remembered as a very energetic woman[101] who worked to secure more and highly qualified staff, promoted links with other institutions, and maintained contacts with many scholars interested in Africa.

Carter's leadership certainly paid off. Towards the end of the decade PAS was a consolidated Program. The course offerings and staffing position had greatly improved.

"During the past six years, the course and seminar offerings in African Studies at Northwestern University have been extended from those disciplines in which there had been established scholars with African experience and scholarly distinction -i.e. in anthropology, economics, geography, history and political science - to African languages and linguistics, the humanities- African art and archaeology, literature, music, verbal art, and philosophy- psychology, education, customary and transitional forms of African law, urban and family sociology, geology and Islamic Africa. The striking expansion in faculty resources and in the variety of subject offerings, has been sponsored not only by the Program of African Studies but with no less enthusiasm by the relevant departments, and goes hand in hand with the more than three-fold increase in the number of African specialists working with Northwestern's departments of liberal arts and the professional schools. In the same period, the geographic scope of the Program of African Studies offerings has increased considerably to include North Africa, the Horn of Africa, and Southern Africa, areas previously omitted from the course offerings and training for advance research."[102]

Student demand was also raising. The number of graduate students enrolled in the Program went from 35 in 1964-65 to 130 in 1968-69. The number of undergraduates taking courses related to Africa also increased greatly.[103] As a result the number of PhDs awarded by PAS up to 1969 was 88.[104]

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[101] Interview with J. Rowe, October 14, 1999.

[102] "Report to the Ford Foundation 1969-1970 for the Program of African Studies and the National Unity Grant." *Program of African Studies Records*. NUA.

[103] NU. "Application for Faculty Research/Study fellows." [September, 1969]. *Program of African Studies Records*. NUA.

[104] "Annual Report for the Program of African Studies, 1971-1972." Appendix A. *Program of African Studies Records*. NUA. This figure included a small number of degrees in anthropology that had been awarded before the creation of the PAS.

The disciplinary breakdown of this number however, will show that not all areas were developing at the same speed. From the 88 degrees awarded 38 were in anthropology, 14 in Political science and 11 in history. The rest were distributed between Geography (8), Economics (6), Sociology (3), Linguistics (2), Psychology (2), Civil Engineering (2), English (1), and Journalism (1).[105] Nine of the eleven degrees in history were granted between 1962 and 1970.[106] These figures show that the real take-off of history within the Program occurred during the 1960s. The reasons for these relatively late results in history can probably be attributed to the lack of a full-time historian in Northwestern. Up to 1963, courses in African history were being taught by visiting professors.

"The pressure for work in African history is increasing, yet it is of so recent date in developing that it is extremely difficult to obtain adequate staff."[107]

The need of the Program to secure the services of a full-time historian of Africa kept Cater in constant search and negotiations with potential candidates and the department of history. There were very few graduates with the right qualifications and the demand for their skills was great. Much of the responsibility of finding a historian seems to have fallen on Carter as director of PAS. The history department showed little involvement. Rowe reminded me that the History department at Northwestern was relatively small. Its chances of growth were rather limited without the, at least initial, support of PAS.[108] This can explain why the main drive to recruit a new historian came from the program and not from the department itself.

In 1963 Robert Hess joined the department as the first full-time historian of Africa. Carter described him as "very promising historian".[109] He had done his graduate work at Yale under the supervision of Harry Rudin and specialised in Ethiopian history. Hess, however, only stayed two years and was eventually replaced by John Rowe who joined the department in 1965. Rowe did his

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[105] *Ibidem.*

[106] "Report to the Ford Foundation 1969-1970 for the Program of African Studies and the National Unity Grant." *Program of African Studies Records*. NUA.

[107] Program of African Studies. "Report 1961-1962." September, 1962. *Program of African Studies Records*. NUA.

[108] Interview with J. Rowe. October 14, 1999.

[109] Gwendolen Carter to Immanuel Wallerstain. November 7, 1963. Gwendolen Carter Correspondence, 1963-1974. *Program of African Studies Records*. NUA.

undergraduate studies at Swarthmore College, after Curtin had left for Wisconsin. However, he became interested in what Curtin had done and got in touch with him and ended up going to do postgraduate work at Wisconsin. During his studies he had the opportunity to travel to England and spent some time at SOAS. There, he used some of the archival material, frequented the African history seminar and learned some Luganda. He was part of a small group of young American historians who were available at the time. As he remembers, scarcity of jobs was not a problem they had to face.[110]

The appointments of Hess and Rowe certainly helped but there was still a need for more staff and arguably at least one more senior professor. During the decade, Carter corresponded with several potential candidates of the likes of Terence Ranger, and Michael Crowder. Finally, in 1966, Northwestern recruited Ivor Wilks who we last saw as deputy director of the IAS in Legon. After the coup against Nkrumah, Wilks position in the Institute became uncomfortable and he decided to leave. He went to Northwestern for a year, then tried Cambridge as Simon Research Fellow in 1966-67. He was unhappy with the situation at Cambridge and finally decided to return to Northwestern where he saw great possibilities of sending students to the field given all the funding that was available.[111]

Despite the staffing problems the Program managed to modestly expand and strengthen their course offerings in history. At the beginning of the decade the Program only offered one course in The History of Africa and one Seminar in the History of Africa that were generally in charge of visiting professors. These were in addition to the two courses on Human Migrations and Expansion of Europe taught by Prof. Scott. In 1965 a new Survey course was added and in 1967 an Independent Study option was also included. By the end of the decade more specialised offerings were set in place. The course in History of Africa was divided in three parts, each one focused in East, West and South and Central Africa. Some of the problems most often discussed in these courses were for example: the origins of man in Africa, the impact of metals, the Bantu migrations, trade, state-

[110] Interview with J. Rowe. October 14.1999.

[111] Interview with I. Wilks. October 12, 1999.

building and nationalism, the slave trade, Islam, and resistance and rebellion. These are very similar to concerns in African and British courses.[112]

Concerns with pre-colonial Africa however, were not reflected in the research of graduate students at Northwestern. A look to the history dissertations shows a strong emphasis on nineteenth and twentieth century history. From the 11 degrees granted before 1970, only three were concerned with periods previous to the nineteenth century.[113] Reasons for this emphasis on modern history can be found in the interests of students themselves. However, it is probably also true to say that, at this stage, Northwestern had few human resources to support more research on pre-colonial Africa, and those who decided to take this option had to take specific provisions. An interesting example is that of Steven Feierman. As an undergraduate in Columbia he became interested in the history of social movements. Events in Sharpeville sparked his interest on social movements in Africa and he decided to follow this path for his graduate work. He decided to go to Northwestern where he found that there was no historian of Africa. His main contact was with Herskovits whose most memorable piece of advice was that he would do well subscribing to the *Journal of African History*. As part of his course, Feierman was required to be examined in four fields of history. He chose two of European history, one in African history (since there was not much there) and decided to take the last field in Anthropology instead of history. This proved to be an important move. Feierman came in touch with Roland Oliver and Jan Vansina while they taught at Northwestern. This was all the training he had on African history. However, he knew what he wanted to do and decided to work mainly under Paul Bohannan, an anthropologist. When it was time to go to the field he thought he was not ready so he spent a year in Oxford doing a Diploma on Social Anthropology. At the end of that year he stayed in England doing archival research and then went to Tanzania to do his fieldwork.[114] Feierman's experience highlights the pragmatic stage at which the field of African history was. Like SOAS, the PAS had problems obtaining staff, but unlike SOAS, PAS did not have the library or archival resources that SOAS students had. Although the PAS did have

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[112] Rowe, J. "Major themes in African history" in Paden, J. and E. Soja. (eds.) *The African Experience. Vol. I.* 1970. pp. 154-176.

[113] "Report to the Ford Foundation 1969-1970 for the Program of African Studies and the National Unity Grant." *Program of African Studies Records.* NUA.

[114] Interview with S. Feierman. November 13, 1999.

economic resources needed to encourage the study of African languages and extended fieldwork. Both institutions had to be pragmatic in their approaches to training of historians. Also as in the case of SOAS this pragmatism paid off. Despite the staff limitations PAS produced fine historians such as Feierman, Ehret and Kimambo.

A problem that many new programs had to face was the creation of a sizeable Library collection. Northwestern did not have the amount of archival resources that SOAS students had. Despite this, the PAS had a slight advantage over other American programs in that it had a significant amount of material on Africa. Herskovits established the Africana Collection in 1954. Since then, it had grown to become the largest separate Africana collection in the continent. It was later named the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies.

The development of African history in Wisconsin followed a different path. One reason for this may be that the initiative to expand African history did not come from the African Studies Program but from the history department itself. This does not mean that there were no problems. A strong and big department gave historians of Africa better chances of introducing their subject. However, it also posed stronger opposition.

As was the case in Northwestern, student demand was increasing. The department was expecting a rise in student numbers throughout the 1960s.[115] In 1961 an article in the *Madison Capital Times* said:

"Advocates of greater emphasis in the liberal arts in higher education will be cheered by the latest news from the University of Wisconsin.
Officials revealed that, of the total enrollment of more than 20,000 students this semester, a record-breaking 5,000 or 25 %, have chosen to take one or more of the 78 courses offered by the Department of History."[116]

This emergent interest in history was, without doubt, related to the highly politicised climate of the 1960s. And one should not forget that the history

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[115] "Report of the Committee on the future of the department." Special Departmental Meeting Minute January 14, 1968. History Department. *Departmental Meetings Minutes*.UWMA.

[116] "History students at U. set record" in *Madison Capital Times*. Madison, Wisconsin, October 4, 1961. p.10.

department in Wisconsin-Madison was known for being a stronghold of the "new left" movement in American academia.[117]

Parallel to the emergence of the New Left in American history, there was also an increasing interest in the history of non-European or Western areas. By 1968 *The Daily Cardinal* the student newspaper reported:

"Recent turnover in the history faculty is creating an imbalance among the various fields of study within the department. There is an outflow of American history professors and an inflow of professors specializing in underdeveloped areas."[118]

There were concerns among historians of Europe and the United States about the apparent decline of these areas. In 1962, Curtin commented on the decline of British history,[119] and some years later another member of the department attended a conference of Atlantic States where the problem of funding for research in American and European history was discussed.[120]
The economic support granted to new areas of research such as African history and its popularity among students was not taken well by everybody in the history department. Curtin remembers what he described as "some very bitter battles fought between people who wanted to innovate in the History department and people who wanted to hold the line against innovation."[121] Particularly strong resistance came from people who worked in the field of USA history and to some degree by people from European history.[122]

"A lot of people in the department at the time had conflicts with me. They felt that I was an empire builder -- that anything I was trying to do in the way of developing world history or African history or a program in comparative world history was not an honest intellectual endeavor but a cheap personal effort to gain advantage over the more traditional fields of history within the department."[123]

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[117] Interview with P. Curtin. November 13, 1999. This certainly attracted many students but did not have any impact in the specific development of African history.

[118] Peck, J. "History department turnover leads to U. faculty imbalance" in *The Daily Cardinal.* Madison Wisconsin, May 9, 1968. p. 10.

[119] Philip Curtin to Executive Committee. October 22, 1962. Department of History. *Departmental Meetings Minutes.* UWMA.

[120] Minute January 20, 1966. History Department. *Minutes of the Executive Committee.* UWMA.

[121] Oral History Project. Transcript of Interview with Philip D. Curtin. 8/5/1975.p.19. UWMA.

[122] *Ibidem.* p.20.

[123] *Ibidem.* p.19-20.

Reluctantly, the department continued to support the development of African history. This shows the strength of students' pressure, but also the support for the field from senior members of the administration. It was this support that allowed Curtin to secure the recruitment of a new historian of Africa, Jan Vansina.

Curtin had met Vansina during his trip to Africa in 1958-59. By then Vansina had carried out extensive research in Kuba history, which eventually resulted in his doctoral dissertation "The historical value of oral tradition: Application to Kuba history." Since then Vansina had devoted his research to oral tradition in Central Africa and its potential use for historians. While working in Rwanda he was caught in the upheaval between Hutus and Tutsis in 1959, and later by the events in Leopoldville in 1960. These circumstances put his research in halt for some time and he went back to Europe hoping to resume his research in the future. Curtin was certainly impressed by Vansina's innovative work and after hearing he was out of a job he decided to recruit him for Wisconsin. Once again, the support of the Vice-President, Fred Harrington was crucial to secure the position. In a week, Curtin was able to present Vansina with an offer for a one-year position.[124]

Vansina joined the University with a joint appointment in the History and Anthropology departments in 1960. He became an important addition to both programs, African Studies and Comparative Tropical History (PCTH), and greatly contributed to the consolidation of African history in the history department.

The Program of Comparative Tropical History was certainly flourishing. In 1965 Curtin wrote:

"Over this period the growth of the Program has far exceeded our original expectations. When the program was launched, we expected to have staff of about three at the end of the five years, with perhaps fifteen or twenty graduate students. In fact, the permanent staff during the present academic year consists of six men, and seventy-four graduate students studying under them."[125]

The distribution of students in the program showed a strong emphasis on African history. In 1965 there were a total of seventy-four students, thirty-three had

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[124] *Ibidem.* p.14.

[125] PCTH. "Annual Report for 1965." Office of International Studies. *Area and International Studies Program Records.* UWMA.

Africa as their main area of concentration, sixteen Tropical America, fourteen South East Asia, nine South Asia, and two North Africa and the Middle East.[126]

At this stage, the main challenges faced by the program were to maintain the levels of funding after the termination of the initial Carnegie grant, and second the recruitment of staff. The first problem was dealt with thanks to the increasing support for students' research that emerged during the 1960s, such as the fellowships from the National Defense Education Act (later Title VI). This extra support was possible through the achievements of the African Studies Program and the establishment of the Department of African Languages and Literature.
As it was mentioned before, the African Studies Program (ASP) grew out of the interest of some members of staff at Wisconsin who shared an interest on Africa. It all started as an informal exchange of graduate students that soon grew to a point in which it needed formal organisation. It was finally officially authorised by the University in September 1961.[127] By this time the Program at Northwestern was well underway and that at UCLA had reached a significant size. Hence, there was little opportunity, at that point, for Wisconsin to obtain funding from the Ford Foundation or other sources.

"We purposely set out to departamentalize as much as possible, with a minimum of administrative staff. During much of the early period it was simply me and a part-time student secretary. This was not only cheap, it assured that departments would hire, say, the best sociologist they could find who was also an Africanist."[128]

The early development of the Program was sustained mainly from the University regular operating funds that covered the major expenses. In 1961 the Program received some extra help from a grant made by the Ford Foundation. The objective of this grant was to reinforce and develop area studies programs in general, and no special provision was made for African Studies. Eventually, however, the ASP did benefited from this money, at the rate of $60,000 per year from a total grant of $1, 200,000. This money was mainly used to support the

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[126] *Ibidem.*

[127] Oral History Project. Transcript of Interview with Philip D. Curtin. 8/5/1975.p.4. UWMA. "Annual Report for the Academic Year 1963-64." Title VI Documents. *African Studies Program Records.* UWM.

[128] *Ibidem.* p.6. Compare this with the experience at Northwestern where the departments took responsibility of their participation in PAS until this was firmly established.

recruiting of staff, to improve the holdings of the Library in African topics, and to support fieldwork by graduate students.[129]

An important component of its early expansion was the creation of the Department of African Languages during the academic year of 1963-1964. Curtin was aware of the importance of such development for the expansion of the Program and pushed for its creation. In his opinion "It was clear in the early sixties that no African studies program in this country was going to be successful unless it was combined with some training in African languages."[130]

Between 1961-1964 there was a significant increase in the number of people in the Program, both staff and students. In 1961 there were four members of staff involved and twenty-five graduate students. In 1964 the staff increased to fourteen and the number of students was fifty.[131] In 1965 the Program was designated African Languages and Area Studies centre. The support from the Office of Education was of great help to increase the level of support for graduate students and to consolidate the expansion of the Program.

"1964-65 was in many ways a year of transition for the African Studies Program: transition between the initial period of extremely rapid growth to a new phase of more selective expansion departing from a firmly established base; transition from a charismatic leadership phase of administration evolution, when the Program first leader was obliged to simultaneously chair the Program, the Department of African Languages and Literature, and the Comparative Tropical History Program, with only part-time student assistance to the bureaucratically mature legal-rational stage with permanent project assistant and stenographer, a separation of the chairmanships; transition finally from an epic when the burdens of establishing an enlarging program is securely represented in the key department and self-sustaining growth may reasonably be expected."[132]

This expansion, however, was not evenly distributed among the different departments. We saw earlier in the case of Northwestern that history, experienced an important increase in student demand and graduates during the 1960s, but was generally slow in developing training in African history. Wisconsin, on the

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[129] Simoons, F. "A plan of operation for the continuation of Language and Area Center for Africa at the University of Wisconsin for 1966-67." Title VI Documents. *African Studies Program Records*. UWM.

[130] Oral History Project. Transcript of Interview with Philip D. Curtin. 8/5/1975.p.10. UWMA.

[131] "Annual Report for the Academic Year 1963-64." Title VI Documents. *African Studies Program Records*. UWM.

[132] Annual Report of the African Studies Program 1964-1965. Office of International Studies. *Area and International Studies Program Records*. UWMA.

other hand, was comparatively strong in this area, and this improved its position within the ASP. In 1963 the history department had twenty-five students that accounted for more than half of the total number of graduate students enrolled in the Program.[133]

The history department in Madison was in a relatively good position to support student demand. However, it was still not possible to accept the large number of students trying to enrol in the field of African history. In the academic year of 1968-69 the Program reported that: "Pressure on graduate admissions continues to be strong, particularly in the field of History where only about 15 or 20 % of those applying for graduate work can be admitted."[134] It was soon clear that new arrangements had to be made to cater for this increased demand, particularly when Vansina had the opportunity to take a job back in Europe, a situation that threatened the position of the department.

Vansina's first appointment in Madison was just for one year. However, this was extended and a couple of years later he was granted tenure. Even at this point Vansina still had in mind to return to Africa or Europe where he thought he would have better chances to concentrate more on research and less on teaching. He took the year of 1963-64 on leave without pay to scan his job opportunities in Europe. This experiment proved to be disappointing and Vansina went back to Wisconsin. This brief episode put Curtin and the history department in the search of a potential replacement.[135] This was the beginning of a search similar to that carried out in Northwestern. Among the candidates that were considered were John Rowe, Robert Rotberg, G.B. Martin, Martin Legassik, Ralph Austen, Leonard Thompson, and Steve Feierman who was finally hired.[136]

So far, African history had been taught within the context the two programs PCTH and ASP. Vansina was unhappy with this situation. In 1965 he promoted the

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[133] "Annual Report for the Academic Year 1963-64." Title VI Documents. *African Studies Program Records*. UWM.

[134] "A proposal to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. USA Office of Education. Language and Area Centers Section for renewal of NDEA African Language and Area Center 1968-69." Title VI Documents. *African Studies Program Records*. UWM.

[135] Minute September 24, 1964. History Department. *Minutes of the Executive Committee*. UWMA.

[136] Ironically, here there was a graduate of Wisconsin working for Northwestern and a graduate from Northwestern working for Wisconsin.

creation of an African history program, independent from Comparative Tropical History. This initiative was successful, although students in this new program were still required to take two courses in a second area of specialisation. In addition to this, students of the African history program did not have the same access to funding from Carnegie. In 1968 Vansina, once again, complained about the situation and managed to push for a reorganisation of the program of African history.[137] Vansina's own opinion on these events is that at the time this fight against African history being included in a framework of "tropical" history was "typical" of the times. Moreover, it revealed the differences of approach between Curtin and Vansina.

"The African History Program was my responsibility, while Phil supervised the Comparative Tropical History Program. I also ran the African research seminar, and Phil took the comparative tropical history seminar, at least until 1969.
This division of labor was not just accidental; it reflected a basic difference in our attitudes towards African history. Phil saw Africa in a world-wide context, and I envisaged an African history for its own sake."[138]

Far from becoming a problem, these differences were a major asset for the program. Most students were able to work with Curtin, Vansina, and later Feierman. Students benefited from this multiplicity of questions and ideas. These particularities of training at Wisconsin had raised the notion of a "Wisconsin school."

Answering this concern Vansina reminds us that the choice of topics among graduate students was characteristic of the times and not exclusive to Wisconsin. There were nineteen theses on pre-colonial Africa, political history and the use of oral traditions, other six in economic history and trade, five on religion and education and three on urbanisation.[139] Wisconsin's reputation was founded on its work on oral traditions and precolonial history. This can be attributed to two factors; first Vansina and later Feierman were able to supervise this type of work, and second, Wisconsin provided a combination of economic and academic resources that supported this kind of research. This made of Madison one of the most important centres for the study of oral traditions and pre-colonial history.

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[137] Vansina, J. *Living with Africa.* 1994. p.140.

[138] *Ibidem.* Interview with P. Curtin November 13, 1999. Interview with S. Feierman. November 13, 1999.

[139] *Ibidem.* p.144.

The cases of Northwestern and Wisconsin show that the study of African history in the United States was greatly helped by Government and private funding. This support was enough to establish the new field despite the opposition among members of the academic community. What is interesting of these experiences is that in none of them is possible to see an attempt to relate the study of African history to the historical experience of the African-American community. In this respect, the study of African history was more related to concerns raised in Africa and Europe, and not with the approaches of local African-American scholars.

Nationalism and independence in Africa were certainly at the core of the development of African history during the 1960s. In the previous pages I have tried to explain how these processes affected the institutional position of African history in Africa, England and the United States. It becomes clear that the development of the new field in particular universities was affected by local circumstances that accelerated it, or determined the types of research that were possible. What is clear about this period is that historians of Africa were no longer in the situation of having to justify their choice. In the words of John Rowe, "The fight was over."[140] It also seems clear, however, that historians did not win this fight themselves. The final word really came from funding bodies and governments who took the decision to support the new field.

Part 2.- Defining African history.

In 1999 a historian remembered the historians of Africa of the 1960s in the following terms:

"...in relying, *faut de mieux,* on mythological oral traditions, reified languages, mute archaeological artifacts and presentist ethnographic descriptions, they tested multiple limits of how they thought as historians. Looking back, their struggles highlight complex balances among several epistemological aspects of historians' craft: between particularity and generality, theory and data, sequence and chronology, internal subjectivities and unavoidable (whether or not "real") externalities, and empathetic similarity and curiosity-stimulating (or fear-provoking) differentiation in the relationship between historians and their subjects."[141]

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[140] Interview with J. Rowe. October 14, 1999.

[141] Miller, J. "History and Africa/ Africa and history" in *American Historical Review*. 104, (1), 1999. p.2.

Certainly, the beliefs and practices of historians were tested by the demands of studying the African past. The new field required a number of changes in the way history had been so far studied. Historians of Africa were instrumental in introducing some of these changes.[142] However, as is the case for most pioneers, the introduction of new ideas became a dialectical process in which the new and the old had to be negotiated. In the following pages I will look at some of the innovations introduced by historians of Africa and at some of the criticism these received. I will also examine how the quest for a new African history adopted the ideas of a "decolonised history" and the "usable past" and made them central to the new field.

In the last chapter we saw how institutions in Africa, Great Britain and the United States opened their doors to the study of African history. This seemed to announce the success of academic historians and politicians in proving that African history was not only relevant but also possible. This victory at the institutional level allowed historians to devote more time to address some of the "internal" problems of the new field, such as the development of a methodology that would enable historians to incorporate new kinds of sources. In other words, they moved from the question of "Why African history" to those of "What is African history? And "How do we do African history?"

Before going any further it is important to clarify my choice of concepts. The 1960s have been frequently characterised as the era of Nationalist or Africanist historiography[143] These two notions were mainly applied to historians of the 1960s by critics of their work during the 1970s and later. I have decided not to use any of these concepts to characterise the historiography of the 1960s. The reason for this is that, in my opinion, they are partial definitions of the historiographical production of the time. Lacking a better descriptive phrase I will call the new tendencies "the new African history". I prefer this simple

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[142] Important innovations were also being made in South Asian history and more generally on the notion of "peoples history". Although, as it will be seen later there were significant differences of approach between historians of South Asia and historians of Africa, and the latter relied more on oral history, archaeology and linguistics, while the former used more the analysis of discourse.

[143] See Neale, C. *Writing independent history: African historiography, 1960-1980.* 1985. Temu, A. and B. Swai. *Historians and Africanist history: a critique.* 1981. Both terms have been used by other authors in a numbers of articles.

characterisation because it was the one used by many historians at the time, and it is not already related to historiographical projects that emerged later in time.[144]

The New African history that emerged in the 1960s was influenced and shaped by a number of elements. From this diversity, came an eclecticism that is not often recognised. This eclecticism was a reflection, first of all, of changes occurring in the historical discipline at the time.[145] Secondly, eclecticism was also a response to the particular challenges of the new field. There was little information available, virtually no standard rules to evaluate it, and there was a need to draw new general frameworks to incorporate such data. Historians had to start somewhere, and they had to face the challenge with an open mind. Therefore, they took their cue from the political ideology of the time, from the known and accepted rules of historical research, from the innovations introduced by new schools of thought, and, of course, from solutions that resulted from their own specific research. All these combined produced a new recipe for African history.

A) African history and Nationalism.

Much has been written about the relationship between Nationalism and African history. On this issue Neale said:

"The key to understanding the model with which historians approached this phasing of African history is the idea of nationalism, for it was the success of nationalism which called forth the revision of history."[146]

It was seen before that the emergence and triumph of nationalism was crucial to prove the relevance of African studies at an institutional level. It is also important; however, to understand the different ways in which it helped to define the study of the African past.

Scholars who have written about Nationalism and history seem to approach this relationship at different levels. The majority, however, accept that there was a

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[144] This can be seen in many book reviews of the time.

[145] One should remember that this was a time when the discipline of history was trying to get closer to other social sciences and their methodologies. The *Annales* school was the most clear example of this trend. At the same time, more questions were also raised about the notions of theory and empirical data. This debate would also eventually affect the work of historians.

[146] Neale, C. *Op.cit.* 1985. p.115.

difference between Nationalism as a political ideology, and Nationalism as a historical idea. Mudimbe for example said:

"...African studies centers multiplied, and African subjects were introduced into university curricula. For the classical theme "all that is European is civilized; all that is African is barbarous" was "all that is African is civilized and beautiful". This intellectual nationalism depended heavily on political nationalism."[147]

For Mudimbe Nationalism became a matter of value and evaluation of culture. He is right in pointing out that much romanticism for the African past was a common feature of the new history. Cultural nationalism had been an important part of historical writing since the nineteenth century, when Africans started to write about their own past.[148] This cultural re-evaluation became an important element of the new historiography, mainly because historians recognised the need to destroy myths and prejudices about African peoples. Unfortunately, there were certainly cases in which less-flattering episodes of the African past were neglected or ignored by historians.

Neale focused her attention on a different aspect of the relationship between history and nationalism:

"As a political movement, nationalism took its force from the colonial situation; but as a historical idea it derived its mysterious domination over centuries of African history from the evolutionism which placed Europeans and their political works at the pinnacle of man's development."[149]

Neale, on the other hand, points to the influence of Nationalism on the general perception of historical processes in Africa. She underlined the impact of evolutionist ideas in the new African history. The former assumed a teleological end to the historical process and put the "Nation-state" at the highest stage of it. This was obviously an attempt to incorporate the African experience within the world-wide historical. Here one has to distinguish two different ideas. First, the need of historians to understand Africa's past as part of universal patterns of historical development. Second, the use of the "nation-state" as an organising historical principle. These two ideas seem to be closely related in this period

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[147] Mudimbe, V. *The invention of Africa.* 1988. p. 169-170.

[148] See Barber, K. & Moraes Farias (eds.) *Self-assertion and brokerage: early cultural nationalism in West Africa.* Birmingham, Centre of West African Studies, 1990.

[149] Neale, C. *Op.cit.* 1985. p. 11.

because the study of nations was at this point in time the problem in which most historiography was focused. However, this was not the only way in which Africa's past was to be interpreted as an universalistic narrative. The teleological understanding of history was closely knitted in the fabric of universal history; but it was not exclusive to the study of nations or to nationalistic historical discourses.

Finally, the relationship between nationalism and history was also criticised for its lack of historical rigour and its problematic ideological implications.

"...Nationalism is more often asserted than demonstrated, that the gulf between proto-nationalism and later nationalism has not been (and perhaps cannot be) bridged, and that a strong ideological commitment has often closed the writer's eyes to difficulties in their approach."[150]

The criticism of Denon and Kuper highlights some important elements of the relationship between nationalism and history. It soon became obvious that most historians in the 1960s had a strong commitment to African liberation and many saw their work as a contribution to the nationalist project. This certainly created some anachronistic and quite simplistic interpretations of the African past. More important, however, was the introduction of the notion of the "usable past" i.e. the view that African history has to serve the African people. Later historians realised that early interpretations of the past served only a reduced number of people (namely the nationalist elites), however, the notion of African history as a "usable past" continued to be at the centre of how African history has been evaluated and perceived.

The most important element of the relationship between nationalism and history was, however, the introduction of the notion of African agency. Nationalism, as a historical concept, redefined the parameters by which the study of Africa could develop. It was more than a change from uncivilised to civilised or from tribes to Nations; it was a move from objects to agents, a crucial ontological shift in historical terms. It was arguably the notion of African agency the one that truly transformed the study of Africa and distinguished it from the field of colonial studies. The notion of African agency, however, was merely a guiding principle and was far from being a solution to the many problems that historians of Africa had to face.

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[150] Denon, D. & A. Kuper. *Op.cit.* 1970. p.338.

The task for historians was to develop methods, techniques and standards that allowed them to know how Africans had behaved in the past and to explain that behaviour. Given the particularities of Africa's historical records historians were faced with a significant challenge. To understand how historians approached the problem of African agency one has to go beyond the issue of nationalism.

B) Community development.

A second element that one has to look at to understand the intellectual environment that produced the new African history of the 1960s is the nature of the academic community that emerged around the new field. The consolidation of any area of study requires the development of such a community. The discussions about "Paradigms" and "Paradigm change" often overlook the fact that, in the end, it is at the individual and community level where many changes take place, or rather in the interaction between both.

The academic community that grew around the study of African history emerged primarily in Africa, the United States and Great Britain. This community first emerged in individual institutions. As we saw before, these institutions had their own particular reasons and resources to support the study of African history, and these determined to a great extent what historians did. For example, on can see the differences between the research developed in the History department at Wisconsin and that developed at SOAS. While historians like Vansina were pushing for the study of oral traditions, historians at SOAS gave greater emphasis to the revisionist readings of colonial archives. This did not reflect a radically different attitude to research on oral traditions. It was rather the recognition that oral research required particular resources that were not fully available to most historians and research students in London.

Differences between British and American historians have often been interpreted in terms of their respective commitments to "decolonisation." This makes us wonder if there were any significant ideological differences among members of the emerging community of historians of Africa.

"The intellectual stance of most historians in the United States differed from that prevalent among the SOAS network, in a direction similar to that of Ibadan and

Dar es Salaam. These scholars held strong anticolonial convictions, and at home they were repulsed by racial discrimination."[151]

In Vansina's opinion, these disagreements came from the professional training of British and American historians. In his opinion, British historians had been trained in "Imperial" history, and this explained their "colonialist" approach to African history.[152] John Fage has refuted this idea arguing that the training he received was very broadly based and was never characterised as "Imperial history." If we look at particular historians one can find it difficult to sustain this argument. We can take two examples, first Philip Curtin, one of the founding members of the academic community in the United States who was trained in British Imperial history. This did influence his approach to African history but not in the way Vansina has attributed to British historians. Roland Oliver, on the other hand was trained on Church history and his interest in Africa came as a spin-off of that interest. As we showed before, many of these pioneers, both those at SOAS and expatriates, came into the discipline not because they had a particular interest in African history but because there was a need to recruit qualified historians in this field. Some of them have had some background in so-called imperial history, but many of them did not. Moreover, one can argue against the idea of some specific kind of training in Imperial history. If one thinks about those historians who did think about their training in those terms, for example John McCracken, one would see that even the approach to Imperial history he was exposed to was already changing. He was a student of Robinson and Gallagher and was influenced by their ideas on the interaction between Europe and the rest of the world, which were significantly different from traditional approaches to Imperial history of the time.[153]

So, what can we make of these differences between American and British historians? In my opinion, these were more related to the practical conditions of each community rather than to their intellectual attitude towards Imperialism or Africa. There were certainly differences in the ways the colonial period was evaluated, some historians gave more emphasis to colonial rather than precolonial history, and there were differing views about how to characterise the

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[151] Vansina, J. *Living with Africa.* 1994. p.117. See also Vansina, J. "Lessons of forty years of African history" in *IJAHS.* 25, 1992. PP.391-398.

[152] Vansina, J. *Op.cit.* 1992.

[153] Interview with J. McCracken. July 7, 1999.

changes in African societies caused by colonial intervention. But the majority of historians at the time were strongly committed to Africa's anti-colonial struggle. As it was seen before, many saw the task of studying African history as a contribution towards that struggle, hence the constant reference to the need to "decolonise the African past" which became very popular then and had since remained important.

There has also been some emphasis on the differences between British and African historians and American and African historians. Vansina says for example: "The main difference between SOAS and Ibadan lay in the confident nationalism of the latter."[154] Later he added: "...the North Americans differed from the Dar School. They were more detached and repudiated the activist view that their studies had to be useful to contemporary African regimes to be acceptable."[155] Neale's opinion was that there were no significant differences between history written by black or white historians. The few differences were in that Europeans and Americans had "a personal need to understand rather than an ideological requirement to convince."[156] These opinions show that the differences were located not so much between white and black historians but between historians who were working in England, Africa and the United States. These particular environments, as we saw in the last section, created specific demands and conditions that affected the work of historians.

Therefore, one can see that in this period, the community of historians of Africa was fundamentally shaped by their institutional environments. There were certainly differences among individuals about particular approaches. But as a community it is not possible to point to substantial differences based on nationality. However, these attempts to find ideological differences in the work of historians from their national origins show an important element in the development of African historiography. It puts forward the importance of attitudes towards Colonialism for the definition and legitimisation of the new field. It clearly shows how there was a need to differentiate African history from Colonial history and how this became central in the definition of the new field.

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[154] Vansina, J. *Opcit.* 1994. p.113.

[155] *Ibidem.* p.117.

[156] Neale, C. *Op.cit.* 1985. p. 104.

The real or perceived attitudes of some historians towards colonialism have since been crucial to determine the quality and value and African history. Thus one can see that the issue of decolonising African history became and remained central, but also that there were many ways in which decolonisation was understood, from the question of who writes history? To the issue of what sources were to be used.

One can conclude therefore that in the whole, there was a relative agreement among members of the academic community. This agreement was mainly founded in the task of producing a history of Africa that had been liberated from the prejudices of colonial domination, and that could be used by Africans in their quest for self-determination. This general agreement was perceived by Vansina through the conferences that occurred during this period: "the general consensus on what African history was all about, even though it remained somewhat fuzzy, owed much to the spirit of such conferences. There were no bitter debates about the nature of the field, its epistemology, or social science views implied in its practice...."[157]

Conferences in the 1960s offer an ideal opportunity to follow the development of the concerns of the academic community. The conference celebrated in Dakar in December 1961 provided good examples of this. The Conference focused of three main issues: "techniques and empirical material available to the historian of Africa; methods of synthesis in history, and history in relation to modern Africa...."[158]

In this conference historians advanced an important step in the process of defining the problems that united historians of Africa. The main questions they all faced were "how can we do African history? How can we apply historical methodology to new types of sources? How can this evidence be validated or invalidated? And last, but certainly not least, how can we put this evidence together?

Another important conference was celebrated four years later in Dar es Salaam. The Dar es Salaam Congress reflected an important moment in the development

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[157] Vansina, J. *Op.cit.* 1994. p.121.

[158] Vansina, J., R. Mauny and L.V. Thomas. "Introductory Summary." *The Historian in Tropical Africa.* 1964. pp. 59-60.

of the concerns of the academic community. Discussions at the Congress were addressed at two main issues: One, "the methodology and assumptions of African historiography" and two, "the themes which were emerging as particularly significant in the study of African history."[159] Within this agenda, what was significant for this Congress was the recognition that African history had reached a point at which an evaluation was needed in order to define more clearly the future of the field.

"It was assumed that there was no longer any need to proclaim the possibility of African history. The need was rather to examine the directions which research and writing of African history had taken, a stock-taking and re-assessment of approach, method and result. And there was in this too an implied intention to examine whether African history was sufficiently *African*; whether it had developed the methods and models appropriate to its own needs or had depended upon making use of methods and models developed elsewhere; whether its main themes of discourse had risen out of the dynamics of African development or had been imposed because of the over-riding significance in the historiography of other continents."[160]

The question of how "African" African history really was, reveals the main concern of historians about authenticity and decolonisation. At this point, historians seemed to agree that an "authentic" African history could be achieved within the frameworks and methods provided by the discipline of history. However, what was urgently needed was the compilation of data and information that could enable historians to discover "the African voice."

"Delegates generally felt, and perhaps rightly, that there was still greater need to insist upon the value of oral material and to stress the urgency of arrangements for its collection that to discuss or challenge the uses made of it when collected. Delegates shied away from the idea of an African historiography in the sense of a historiography that embodied "African" concepts of time or causation; it was asserted that there was an internationally accepted set of historical concepts which it was important for African history to employ. Even the discussions on the adequacies or otherwise of Marxist and western interpretations of African history were not really pushed home: no formidable challenge was made to Professor Oliver's assertion that African historical studies in Europe and America were concerned with the same issues and approaching them from the same angles as African historical studies in Africa."[161]

The sense of urgency for the compilation of oral material is quite understandable given the nature of these sources. However, this urgency also reveals a belief,

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[159] Ranger, T.O. "Introduction." Ranger, T.O. (ed.) *Emerging themes of African history.* 1968. p.IX.

[160] *Ibidem.* pp.IX-X.

[161] *Ibidem.* pp.X-XI.

common among historians of the time, that oral sources were somehow the essence of African history. The almost blind belief on the value of oral material made it difficult for historians to appreciate the numerous problems involved with these sources. It also obscured other problems such as the crucial relationship between African history and universal history that was simply taken for granted.

Conferences were also important to enlarge the community and to assess changes in its composition. In this respect a third conference deserves to be mentioned: the Lusaka Conference celebrated in 1969. The reason why this conference was so important is that it had a crucial role in popularising the New African history among South African historians.

"That conference formed a key moment in the history of historical writing on South Africa. Omer-Cooper, by then Professor of history at the University of Zambia was the local host, and Thompson the organiser and guiding spirit of the conference, which, for the first time revealed the extent of the new internationalism of South African history writing. No longer were the professional historians of South Africa almost all based at South African universities; indeed by 1968 the most challenging work was being carried on outside the country."[162]

The importance of this development in South African historiography will be fully appreciated in the next chapter. Many of the historians who attended this Conference or who sent papers to it, were to develop a whole new approach to the study of the South African past that would in turn become important for the whole of African history. Among those attending the Conference were: Shula Marks, Antony Atmore, Colin Webb, Monica Wilson, David Hammond-Tooke, and some students of Thompson from UCLA such as William Lye and Gerrit Harinck. Martin Legassik did not attend but sent in a paper.[163]

By the end of the 1960s the academic community in charge of the study of African history had not only developed new concerns, it had also become much larger. This was enough to justify the creation of the *Journal of African History* at the beginning of the decade. However, as Oliver himself admits, it was the American market that made it possible for *JAH* to become financially

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[162] Saunders, C.C. *The making of the South African past.* 1988. p.152.

[163] *Ibidem.* pp. 152-153.

independent.[164] The growth in the number of historians in the United States has been mentioned and partially analysed in the last section in the cases of Northwestern and Wisconsin. The trend of increasing numbers of historians of Africa was seen all over the USA, and it was important enough to allow for the creation of a second journal *African Historical Studies.* This was an initiative of Norman Bennett from Boston University, and grew from the concerns of American historians that *JAH* was no longer representative of the interests of historians in the United States. The journal was launched in 1972 and eventually became the *International Journal of African Historical Studies.*

The emergence of this second journal is proof that, by the end of the 1960s the wider community of historians of Africa was beginning to be less homogeneous in its concerns and ideas. The 1970s would see an important re-articulation of the community around different academic and even political approaches. This was a necessary result of the growth of the field both in numbers and complexity.

What must be emphasised now is that the community that studied African history during the 1960s was crucial in achieving the consolidation of the field. Despite individual and institutional differences, historians were aware of the epistemological and practical needs of the field at that point, and devoted their energies towards those aims. It is worth of notice that in an era that saw bitter and divisive political debate the community did not become more divided. This can be attributed to the recognition by members of all national origins that the "decolonisation" of African history did not depend on who was writing African history but on how it was to be written. This would change in decades to come, but during the 1960s decolonisation revolved around the object of African history and the sources and methods employed to study this object.

C) The methodology of African history.

Having looked at the concerns that united the community of historians, I will now turn to some of the solutions they gave to some defining questions such as what is African history? And how can African history be done?

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[164] Oliver, R. *Op.cit.* p.169.

During the 1950s and 1960s the field of African history defined itself in opposition to colonial history. During the 1960s, however, historians looked at ways to define further this basic principle. Vansina identified five elements to characterise the approach of historians of the 1960s: First, "Africa" should include the whole of the continent, North Africa and South Africa including Egypt. Second, African history should concentrate in the study of the experience of Africans; it should be guided by "the African point of view." Third, they denied the relation of necessity between written evidence and history. Fourth, the study of the African past could be approached through concepts similar to those used in European history. Finally, African history should show that Africans had always been able to achieve progress and complexity in their social and political organisations.[165]

The project of the New African history was centred on the notion of "an African point of view" or "the African voice." This idea encapsulated the principle of African agency that was guiding the work of historians. The fact that Africans could be architects of their own history made it possible for historians, at least in principle, to search the evidence of their achievements. This notion was, however, merely a starting point, and it certainly raised more doubts than solved problems. The question of "which African voice?" did not seem to be a problem and further questions about how to define the "African" itself would eventually be raised. However, at that specific moment in time the notion served a specific purpose, to establish the viability of African history by affirming the existence of such thing as African agency. The complexity of the notion was hidden by the problems in establishing it as a valid field of research.

Another important principle for the production of African history was the idea that the reconstruction of the African past could employ the same interpretative concepts used in European history. However, there were some disagreements about which concepts or which methods were suitable for the understanding of Africa's experience. This was a particularly significant problem if one takes into account that historians had very little empirical evidence for their reconstruction of the past. The ever-present danger was to use theory to fill the gaps left by the lack of evidence. One can see this debate for example in a review written by Oliver

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[165] Vansina, J. *Op.cit.* 1994. p.48.

on Vansina's *Paths through the Rain Forest.* After looking at some of the main arguments in the book Oliver said: "...if it mentions too many tribal and place-names and too few sources in the text, it is sometimes naïve in suggesting that sociological formulae can solve historical problems...."[166] Seen out of context Oliver's comment could be interpreted as a rejection of the use of sociological concepts for the solution of historical questions. But one has to remember that Oliver himself had used other methods to address questions similar to those approached by Vansina. The main difference between the two was the choice of disciplines from where they adopted such theoretical concepts. While Oliver favoured archaeological and linguistic data, Vansina preferred anthropological models.

This debate illustrates that the use of theoretical approaches was not a ready-made solution for the problems faced by historians of Africa. The decision to use one method or the other is usually made on the basis of an understanding of the questions and most importantly, the sources. Historians of Africa, at this stage had little of the latter and thus were in an uncomfortable position to decide which theories or concepts were better suited for the interpretation of the African past.

The first challenge for historians then was a very pragmatic one. How to find evidence that will allow us to know past African experience? And How to evaluate this evidence? To solve these problems, historians looked to other disciplines. Interdisciplinarity became the buzzword of the sixties.

The Dakar Conference was particularly concerned with the role of interdisciplinary research in the development of African history, and many papers were devoted to show how historians could benefit from this approach.[167] Despite all that was said about the importance of interdisciplinary studies, historians were not sure how to achieve this.[168] By the mid-twentieth century disciplines had been developing towards more specialised knowledge. It was at this time also, that some historians started to recognise that a more integral

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[166] Oliver, R. "The Woodland Bantu." *JAH.* VII, 3. 1966. p.516.

[167] See for example: Abraham, D.P. "Ethno-history of the Empire of Mutapa", Armstrong, R.G. "The use of linguistic and ethnographic data in the study of Idoma and Yoruba history" and Mauny, R. "Les 'fossiles directeurs' en archéologie ouest africaine".

[168] Dakar was also important because it brought together Anglophone and Francophone historians, in an attempt to transcend the boundaries imposed by colonialism. Unfortunately, this division has remained.

approach to historical knowledge was needed. However, historically this had become rather difficult.

Some historians in Africa and Europe thought that the best way out of the problem was teamwork. This belief gave birth to the so-called schemes. The first one, the Benin Scheme was launched in 1956 with the financial support of the Carnegie Corporation and under the initiative of K.O. Dike. Later came the Yoruba History Scheme in charge of Biobaku, followed by the Northern Nigeria Research Scheme and the Eastern Nigeria History Project. These schemes involved the collaboration of historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, and other scholars. The idea was to concentrate their efforts to collect enough evidence to reconstruct the African past. In other places such as Ghana and East Africa this kind of co-operation was encouraged in Research Institutes rather than through specific schemes. Such were the cases of the Institute of African Studies in Legon and the British Institute of History and Archaeology in East Africa. There were also attempts from individual historians to acquire expertise in other disciplines. Such cases proved to be very successful. Some examples are Jan Vansina, Steve Feierman and Christopher Ehret.

Interdisciplinary research, however, carried also some disadvantages that were not properly assessed during the 1960s. Exchange between disciplines did not only occur at the level of data-collection and techniques. Implicit interpretations of processes and their meaning were also traded. In accepting evidence, historians also accepted means of evaluation of that evidence and therefore accepted a particular interpretation of events. In this way, problems, concerns and premises of other disciplines were included in the emerging tradition of African history and therefore became part of its language and methodology.

Archaeology was considered to be a crucial auxiliary discipline in the reconstruction of the African past: "The contribution of the archaeologists to African history is not marginal. For the earliest periods archaeology is of course practically the only source of information for the historian; for earliest periods it supplies him with first-rate information and enables him to verify facts suggested by other sources."[169]

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[169] Vansina, J., R. Mauny, and L.V. Thomas. *Op.cit.* 1964. p.65.

The influence of archaeology was felt at two levels. First, it provided information on dates, and offered the basis for a potential chronology of African history. On a second level, historians were also influenced by the archaeological theories of the time, since they accepted data without questioning how this had been obtained. In a review of the book *The historian in Tropical Africa* that resulted from the Dakar Conference, one can appreciate this debate. There seems to be a division between historians who relied on archaeology and accepted its main heuristic device, the diffusionist principle; and those who argued against the idea of a single ethnic source for the state systems in Central Africa.[170] This shows that the impact of archaeology went beyond the sole provision of information. It determined, to a certain extent, the processes that were to be researched and the criteria to be used to validate data.

However, as the relationship between history and archaeology developed, archaeologists pointed out other potential problems. Some years later, in the Dar es Salaam Congress, Merrick Posnansky warned against expecting too much from archaeology:

"But though we are at the threshold of what seems to be a major break-through in the kind of archaeological data that will be available, too much should not be expected from the archaeologist. There is an inherent danger of asking questions which cannot be answered and answering them by inference to conclusions which were never intended for a wider application. Archaeology at best provides material information on technology of a people, their basic economy, possibly the rough size of their social units, their burial practices and to a certain extent their artistic achievement. It cannot detail their social organisation, their political economy, their language, religion or their cultural ethos... Even where considerably more work has been conducted as around Chad, in Rhodesia and in parts of East Africa the spread is limited, and comparisons are difficult. With such patchy foundation it is doubly dangerous to engage in widespread correlations of cultural objects which lead to interpretations in terms of folk movements. There is at present insufficient knowledge of present day African ethnography to indulge too openly in comparative analysis by reference to present day ethnological parallels."[171]

Posnansky was particularly concerned with the differences between historians and archaeologists regarding the notion of civilisation. This was evident when Posnansky said:

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[170] Stokes, E. "The Dakar seminar on ethno-history." *JAH.* VI, (2), 1965. p.234.

[171] Posnansky, M. "Archaeology: its uses and abuses." Ranger, T. O. (ed) *Emerging themes of African history.* 1968. pp. 63-64.

"A problem which confronts the prehistorian concerns the ascription of the word 'civilisation' to many of the technologically advanced Iron Age societies of Africa. Was Zimbabwe civilised? Is a question that has often been posed. The answer demanded is often implied in the urgency of the questioner and there has been a trend in popular African historiography to look for the forgotten civilisations and the former urban development of large parts of sub-Saharan Africa."[172]

Posnansky was clearly concerned with the attempts made then and still made, of presenting the achievements of past civilisations to legitimise present Nation-states. He reminded historians that archaeologists had specific criteria to apply the concept of civilisation: "The way one views civilisation is clearly one of scale and the historian has to beware of introducing value judgement and looking at the past from present perspectives."[173]

In addition to these theoretical discussions, archaeologists of Africa had other practical problems. First, there was the relative lack of archaeological remains in Africa. Archaeology depends on material evidence, and the environmental conditions in much of the continent were not conducive to the preservation of these. With some exceptions like Great Zimbabwe and Egypt, Africa seemed to lack the richness of material remains that had been found in Central and South America for example. This was probably one of the causes for the historical neglect of Africa by archaeologists. During the 1950s and 1960s some scholars were ready to redress this situation. But archaeology is a costly and slow business and in Africa there was a significant lack of the laboratories and researchers needed to research such a vast continent. This made the process of accumulating evidence much slower. It is common feature of writings of the time to hear much of the potential of archaeology and little about actual contributions.[174]

Linguistics was also seen as a source of evidence often cited by historians of Africa. The techniques and concerns developed by linguists however also set some limitations to the work of historians. In general terms, more emphasis was put on the classification of languages, the tracing of exchanges and innovations rather than on the links between language and people. Historians in the Dakar

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[172] *Ibidem.* p.69.

[173] *Ibidem.* p.70.

[174] Vansina, J., R. Mauny, and L.V. Thomas. *Opcit.* 1964. p.68. Research on the origins of man-kind is an exception to this. A Significant amount of resources have been allocated to study the areas of Africa that are likely to be the cradle of humanity, East Africa and South Africa. Unfortunately, more recent periods of African history have not received the same attention.

Conference proposed the use of some techniques for historical reconstruction: Comparative linguistics, analysis of common innovations, semantic study of reconstituted parent languages, research on linguistic borrowings and glottochronology. Since then, historians were aware of the limitations posed by some of these techniques: "...the nature of comparative linguistics allows only for hypothesis with regard to the origin, diffusion and migration of languages. We know that human groups which possess a language in common are not necessarily homogeneous in other cultural, social and political fields...."[175]

The fact that most of Africa seemed to be dominated by a single linguistic group, the Bantu, encouraged this kind of research. Particularly when it was believed that language was also an indication of cultural and political patterns. Research on linguistic borrowings was also seen as productive way of investigating the influence of one culture over another. This technique was based on the semantic analysis of terms that occurred in different cultures. One can easily see, however, the main disadvantage of linguistic evidence. It was, as archaeology, too focused on the transmission and direction of culture rather that on the people who produced it.

Furthermore, Linguists also required long-term research and substantial ethnographic data to corroborate potential historical evidence, none of which were available at the time. In this respect, both archaeology and linguistics were dependent on the progress of each other and such progress was still very limited.

It was partially for these reasons that, despite the encouragement to use linguistics and archaeology in historical research, historians of the 1960s did not use them as widely as one would have expected. In the words of another historian: "...in most cases the new goals were easier to announce than to translate into realised historical work."[176]

The Social sciences, on the other hand, had a more immediate impact on the new field. Historians were relatively more familiar with the methods of Anthropology, Sociology and Political Science.

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[175] *Ibidem.* p.74.

[176] Austen, R. "Africanist historiography and its critics: Can there be an autonomous African history?" Falola, T. (ed.) *African historiography: Essays in honour of Jacob Ade Ajayi.* 1993. p.207.

"Social-science models tempted historians also because they offered the alluring logical coherence of theory to paper over the initial lack of enough empirical evidence from the African past to make sense on its own terms, and to distract from the dubious standing, by conventional historical standards, of what there was."[177]

The interaction with the social sciences was certainly not easy or unproblematic. However it did give historians some basic concepts and frameworks that helped them to articulate their knowledge about Africa. In the United States, for example, Modernisation theory was very influential in the area of African Studies. This perspective emphasised the role of capitalism in economic advance, political democracy and social equilibrium. It provided an universalistic view of social development within which Africa was soon included. Modernisation theory was not concerned with Africa in particular, but attempted to use African evidence to prove its universal validity.[178] The impact of this theory, however, was felt more strongly in areas like Political Science and Economy. Historians did not openly use it, but some of their interpretations were certainly influenced by it. For example, some authors have traced some similarities between modernisation theory and the approach adopted by liberal historians in South Africa.

"...their conservatism derived from the ideological assumptions and concepts of the early cold war period. Writing during the longest internationally coordinated capitalist boom in history, South African liberals operated with an implicit (and sometimes explicit) model of a modernizing capitalism...Even after liberal history had been substantially reoriented towards Africanist themes and concerns, such premises remained largely intact."[179]

Therefore, even when the theoretical concepts employed by proponents of Modernisation theory in the United States were not often openly used by historians of Africa, some of the basic assumptions behind it were present in many of their works.

Other social sciences however, had an evident impact on the new African history. Such was the case of Anthropology. The most important case of interdisciplinary co-operation came arguably on the issue of the interpretation of oral traditions.

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[177] Miller, J. *Op.cit.* 1999. p.8. One should also remember that in the 1960s the social sciences were considerably more popular than they are today.

[178] Hyden, G. "African studies in the mid 1990s. Between Afro-pessimism and Amero-skepticism." *African Studies Review.* 39, (2), 1996. pp.8-9.

[179] Bundy, C. "An image of its own past? Towards a comparison of American and South African historiography" in *Radical History Review.* 46/47, 1990. pp.127-128.

These offered historians with material that could, in their opinion, be used as a historical source, but the majority agreed on the dangers of taking this information uncritically.

Jan Vansina, who in 1961 published *De la Tradition Orale*, made the most significant contribution in this area[180]. In this book Vansina explored the peculiarities of oral traditions as historical sources and analysed the ways in which they could be evaluated and incorporated into historical writing. Vansina's assessment at that point said: "...oral tradition can be of real value, but doubts must be entertained about it unless it can be substantiated by other historical sources."[181]

Vansina started by looking at the approaches that anthropologists and ethnographers had taken towards the analysis of oral traditions. Among them he looked at the views of anthropologists such as Boas who approached anthropology from the perspective of cultural history. He and his followers -among who were Herskovits and Fuller- supported the idea that oral traditions could be used as historical sources as long as it was possible to cross-reference that information with other sources.[182] In contrast, Vansina also discussed other positions that denied the historical value of oral sources. E.E. Evans-Pritchard and the functionalist school for example, put so much emphasis on the "function" of oral traditions within a determined social structure that denied the fact that they could provide any valid information about the past.[183] After examining these positions Vansina concluded that: "Ethnographic and historical studies on the subject show that the value of oral traditions as historical evidence is a problem that has to be solved, but although they have certainly raised important questions concerning it, none of them provides a general discussion on the special nature of oral traditions as a source of information about the past, nor attempts to apply the methods of historical criticism to these sources."[184] Vansina went to examine in-detail the nature and function of oral testimonies. He also looked at ways of evaluating such testimonies basically through comparison with other sources and

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[180] Translated as *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*. Trans. H.M. Wright. London, 1965.
[181] Vansina, J. *Op.cit.* 1965.p.8.
[182] *Ibidem.* p.10.
[183] *Ibidem.* p.12.
[184] *Ibidem.* p.18.

through the analysis of how testimonies are transmitted. Finally, he looked specifically at types of traditions, tales, poetry, and lists, among others and examined the ways in which those traditions could be biased. Finally, and significantly he stated the importance of other disciplines, such as archaeology, linguistics and physical anthropology to the understanding of oral evidence. Having explored all these issues Vansina reached the conclusion that oral traditions could be used as historical evidence. However, their use demanded the application of historical methodology. For Vansina this meant "that study of a culture cannot be carried out unless a thorough knowledge of the culture and the language has previously been acquired." And he continued to say: "This is something which is taken for granted by historians who work on written sources, but it is too often apt to be forgotten by those who undertake research into the past of pre-literate peoples."[185]

This requirement was arguably the most important element of the methodology he proposed. It obviously gave primary importance to disciplines such as ethnography that were concerned with the study and description of cultures. This view was expressed in the Dakar conference:

"...no historian can effectively explore the past of a culture without knowing it thoroughly as it is, and it is precisely the task of the ethnographer to provide this description and analysis."[186]

In his paper presented to the Conference, Vansina took this idea a step further by introducing the notion of Process-models. In this piece Vansina reminded historians that the mere accumulation of information was not enough. Historians are required to assess the significance of this information and this could be achieved by the use of process-models. These were defined as "a diachronic model representing the change from an earlier synchronic model to a later one. It indicates the trends of change and shows thus the relative significance of any particular change for the whole process."[187]

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[185] *Ibidem.* p.183.

[186] Vansina, J. R. Mauny, and L.V. Thomas. *Op.cit.* 1964. p.69.

[187] Vansina, J. "The use of process-models in African history." Vansina, J. R.Mauny and L.V. Thomas (eds.) *Op.cit.* 1964. p.379.

The use of models and process-models is only one way in which ethnography and anthropology became the single most important articulating device for the new African history. These disciplines presented the conceptual frameworks required by historians to articulate their information and to reconstruct the historical process. Moreover, unlike linguistics and archaeology, anthropology had been investigating the African scene for many years and did have a relatively large body of information ready available to the historian. Unfortunately, historians used much of the anthropological data without understanding the methods and questions that had produced it.

"Although historians rejected the connotations of backwardness conveyed by the colonial idea of "tribes", the functional integrity of African "societies" rendered every element of the contexts in which people "must have" lived so essential to all others that reference in a conventional dated source to one of them seemed to allow historians to assume the connected presence of most, or surely some, of the otherwise undocumented past. Functional "tribal" integration of this sort allowed historians, further, simply to bundle conclusions of all other disciplines they had engaged, assuming that conclusions from one could verify inferences from others without considering the specific contexts that might have generated each."[188]

Anthropology provided historians with a cultural map, a classification of people, practices, and institutions. However, they took little time to understand the ways in which such information had been produced.

Interdisciplinarity was -and still is- a fundamental building block of modern African history. One has to question however the results of this practice in the 1960s. Most historians were badly equipped to embark in interdisciplinary research, and most disciplines were also unable to give the historian valuable evidence.

"The ahistoricity, even anti-historicity, of the social science disciplines with which aspirant Africanist historians had to begin forced them to look deep into their own professional souls as well. Their experience of inventing history for Africa, not by rejecting established standards but by embracing and extending them to integrate unconventional forms of which the world's "people without history" had remembered their pasts, exposed inner logics of historical reasoning."[189]

Interdisciplinarity would certainly uncover new dimensions of historical understanding. However, historians in the 1960s were still coming to terms with

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[188] Miller, J. *Op.cit.* 1999. p.15.

[189] *Ibidem.* pp.24-25.

the complexity of this approach and most of their attempts were full of misunderstandings and misrepresentations.

Historians of Africa during the 1960s however, were not only concerned with techniques and methods of evaluation. Part of their challenge was to give the new field some direction in terms of research agendas. As we have seen, nationalism provided the basic notion of African agency, and interdisciplinary research was the solution to the problem of how to have access to African experience. Now historians had to determine which aspects of African experience were worthy of being researched and how could this experience be incorporated in wider historical processes.

The Dar es Salaam Congress was a significant step forward in this respect. Historians in this Congress were still concerned with matters of method, however they were more aware of the shortcomings of interdisciplinary research. In the book that contains some of the Congress papers, Ranger, for example, reflected on the new questions raised about oral traditions:

"It seems high time that a rigorous methodological debate be conducted on the collection and assessment of oral evidence...It becomes more obvious that the classical treatment of oral evidence by Vansina deals with situations which are an exception rather than the rule and that we badly need similar discussions of the collection and evaluation of oral history in other types of society. Again, the fact that so much oral history has now been attempted makes it both possible and urgent to ask what the oral historian can and cannot do with propriety and success."[190]

It is important to realise that historians of the time were already becoming aware of some of the problems involved in their methodological approaches. However, members of this Congress were still generally convinced of the potentially successful use of oral sources, archaeology and linguistics for the reconstruction of African history.

Also important in this Congress was their attempt to encourage research in particular areas. By doing this historians were adding another element to their project of African history. A quick look at some of the papers presented at the Congress give us an idea of the main areas of concern for historians: Not

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[190] Ranger, T. *Op.cit.* 1968. p.XII.

surprisingly, several papers dealt with issues of evidence and interdisciplinary research. Particular importance was given to the role of Islamic sources, an area rarely discussed in the past, but now perceived as potentially very rich. Slavery and the slave trade also figure as important areas of research together with the emerging question of the African Diaspora. African resistance was a classic approach to the study of African agency during the colonial period, which was still considered an important area of research, together with the origins of Nationalism. Other areas that did not appear in the Conference proceedings but were also regarded as important were African religions, and intellectual and cultural history.[191]

In the 1960s, historians were aware of the importance of pre-colonial history for the consolidation of the new field, and they devoted a good amount of work to this area. However, the interpretation of the colonial period continued to occupy an important place among historians. It is not surprising that in the current political atmosphere, the issue was controversial and problematic. Book reviews of the time show some of the debates. See for example the view of Olatunjin Oloruntimehin on the book *The Conquest of the Western Sudan: A Study in French military imperialism* by A.S. Kanya- Foster:

"The present generation [of historians] however, appears to be committed to painting a picture of Europe as compromising freedom-loving people who did not want to endanger the liberty and freedom of others, but were only pushed along such a course of action by some pressure groups or through accidents."[192]

The author identified this position as that of the "official mind." This was synthesised in the affirmation that: "Britain came to acquire colonial territories in Africa principally because of her officials (official mind) were in search of security for her international interests, in particular because the officials were anxious to protect Britain's old empire in India and her states in the east."[193]

Other positions paid more attention to less formal aspects of the impact of colonialism, such as African resistance. Michael Crowder's *West Africa under Colonial Rule* was an example of this approach. This was certainly a popular

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[191] *Ibidem.* p.XVI.

[192] Olatunji Oloruntimehin, B. "Theories of the 'Official mind' and 'military imperialism' as related to the conquest of the Western Sudan." *JHSN.* V, (3), 1970. p.420.

[193] Quoted in *Ibidem.*

perspective, but soon revealed some of the shortcomings of other similar works. In the words of a reviewer: "what we need now is a social history of West Africans, with a discussion of Euro-African actions and reactions serving merely as a background."[194]

The problems to interpret the colonial period in the context of the new African history were explored by Jacob Ade Ajayi in the Dar es Salaam Congress of 1968. Here he presented a paper entitled "The continuity of African institutions under colonialism".[195] In this piece, Ajayi attacks the way myths about the African past have affected the study of the colonial period and identifies a "false" dilemma in current studies.

"I suspect that the question whether African institutions survived or were disrupted by colonial rule arises out of these myths and assumptions about the African past. My first reaction, therefore, is to say that discussing it will only lead us into a sterile argument and, in any case, the question is out of date."[196]

For Ajayi the attempt to understand the colonial period in terms of the survival or destruction of African institutions during the colonial period was similar to questioning the notion of African agency. After all, if Africans were able to take control of their own lives and history under colonial circumstances the real question would be not if institutions survived or not, but how they changed.

"I think that the really significant question which emerges from the little we know is not whether colonial rule disrupted African institutions or whether or not the institutions have shown continuity, but rather how they have adapted to the changing circumstances."[197]

In other words, the colonial period needed to be fully transformed into an African process in which Africans had also participated, and not just as an external intervention. To do this was not only crucial for the understanding of the colonial period, but it was also important for the achievement of a balanced view of the African experience that took African agency seriously.

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[194] Idowu, H.O. "Review of *West Africa under colonial rule.*" *JHSN.* V, (1), 1969. p.177.

[195] Ajayi, J.F.A. "The continuity of African institutions under colonialism." Ranger, T.O. (ed.) *Emerging themes on African history.* (Proceedings of the International Congress of African historians held at University College Dar es Salaam, October 1968.) Kenya, East African Publishing House, 1968. pp. 189-200.

[196] Ajayi, J.F.A. *Op.cit.* 1968. p.192.

[197] *Ibidem.* p.198.

Ironically, the way in which African agency was understood in the 1960s (either as resistance or initiative) prevented historians from paying more attention to Ajayi's approach. The quest of decolonising African history encouraged the polarisation of "the African" and "the colonial" and obscured the processes of integration and adaptation that could have allowed for a better understanding of Africa's colonial and pre-colonial past.

Towards the end of the 1960s, Ranger, for the first time, talked about a "crisis" in African history. The work of the new African history came under attack and the new approaches were characterised as "Radical pessimism."

"In these years the disillusionment with the apparent impotence of independent Africa to develop itself, to attain unity, or to liberate the south, has made many men firm adherents of the Fanonesque analysis of African nationalism. The historian who persist in treating national movements as something of genuine importance and formidable energy; who sees African peoples winning their independence in the face of colonial reluctance and suppression; who believes that mass participation was at various point crucial; has to argue his case against a wide belief that national independence was an episode in a comedy in which the colonial powers handed over to their selected and groomed bourgeois successors and in which nothing fundamental was changed. This would seem to me to have become the fundamental debate both of contemporary African politics and of much of African historiography...The Africanist historian, who follows up the suggestions of Professor Ajayi or Dr. Lonsdale and who emphasises African activity, African adaptation, African choice, African initiative, will increasingly find his main adversaries not in the discredited colonial school but in the radical pessimist."[198]

This debate was certainly moving to the centre of African historiography and was to produce various divisions among the growing community of historians. The "Radical pessimism" that Ranger described was to develop into a number of different positions that emerged during the 1970s and will be examined in the following chapter.

Nowadays it is widely accepted that the new African history of the 1960s was full with problems. A modern scholar said: "Africanist historical scholarship was the unacknowledged child of nineteenth century European positivist historiography, an it was brought into being just as its genitor was on the way of becoming thoroughly discredited in more vibrant areas of intellectual (including historical)

[198] Ranger, T.O. *Op.cit.* 1968.

inquiry."[199] African history certainly inherited much of the problems that traditional historiography had, but it also made significant contributions to the changes that the field would experience. Many of the methodological and theoretical mistakes of that time have been criticised and revised. However, problems derived from the notions of "usable past" and "decolonised" history, continue to be important for the evaluation of African history.

[199] McCaskie, T. "Empire, State: Asante and the historians." *JAH.* 33, (3). pp.468-469.

CHAPTER IV

Crisis and fragmentation.

The 1970s saw important changes in the field of African History. The field became more diverse and complex, both in its institutional development and its historiographical evolution. The optimism about the future of African nations was confronted with the crude social and economic problems that affected the continent. Universities inside and outside Africa started to wonder about the role of history in the development of Africa and in their particular national contexts. The doubts about the value of African History in African and Western universities emerged also in the midst of wider intellectual and epistemological transformation. This affected the humanities and social sciences in general and increased the questions about the intellectual and social value of historical research. Given all of these changes, the 1970s were years when historians of Africa were forced to reflect upon the contributions of their work to the wider development of African peoples.

Part 1. - The crisis of Institutions.

A) The decline of History in African universities.

Any reference to the notion of a crisis in African History has to refer to the serious decline that many African universities have suffered since the mid- 1970s. Material and political conditions in African countries deteriorated severely in the decades after independence. These had, in most cases, a detrimental effect on the work and performance of universities, since all of them were funded by the state. This often affected their levels of autonomy. They were not always free to voice critical views on the deteriorating social and political situation of their countries.

Africa's political situation was changing very fast. Many countries came to be haunted by dictatorships and military regimes. Economic collapse and political and social instability were of great concern. The history written during the 1960s had not been the unifying force that had been expected. Development became top of the agenda, and History did not seem to figure in as a discipline that could contribute to this process anymore.

The 1970s saw an acute decline in the funds that universities were receiving. Research in African History had flourished a decade before in the midst of an impressive expansion of the higher education system in the USA, Africa and Britain. Such levels of growth could not be maintained and universities were forced to make hard choices. African universities felt these restrictions harder than other institutions. This had a detrimental effect on the study of African History. This was particularly serious because these universities were the natural environments for the development of the field. If African institutions were not able to provide leadership in the field, the credibility of the enterprise was under threat.

The problems raised by this situation can be appreciated, for example, in the existing provisions for postgraduate training. The Commission for Training, Research and Exchange of Information in the Workshop on the Teaching of History organised by the Association of African Universities highlighted the following problems:

"i. - Inadequate budgetary allocation by the governments for postgraduate training in history and related disciplines in the social sciences and the Arts;
ii. - The conception, albeit erroneous, that training at graduate levels in these fields is a luxury;
iii. - The charge of irrelevance against projects in history;
iv. - The dependence on external funding and the resultant dependency on criteria and priorities by donor institutions...."[1]

This illustrates some of the problems faced by historians in African universities. We will turn now to the specific cases of Legon and Dar es Salaam to see how these general issues affected these institutions.

Legon faced very severe disruption between 1975 and 1985 and this was bound to affect the performance of the History Department. The morale and the quality of life of members of staff suffered as teaching loads increased and research activity declined.

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[1] Association of African Universities. Workshop on the teaching of African History in African Universities. University of Lagos 21-24 September 1977. Report of the Commission of Research, training and exchange of information. p. 9.

Unrest in the University during this period was the combined result of a highly politicised student population, political instability in the country, and common and acute shortages of water, petrol and other basic commodities that made the life of students and workers even more difficult. Student demonstrations were a common occurrence during this period (1968, 1976, 1977, 1978, and 1979). The University had to be closed on many occasions and many of these were accompanied by a significant amount of violence. Workers were also unhappy with their working conditions, and they staged strikes on 1975 and 1980. The situation became even worse with the shortages of water, electricity and petrol that the country was suffering. Changes in the political situation of the country also put the university on the spot once again. A new military government seized power in 1972 and attempted to interfere in the running of the university, once again threatening the principle of academic freedom. The issue was finally resolved, but not without long negotiations between the government and the university. Towards the end of the decade another coup took place, this time under the leadership of J.J. Rawlings. Two weeks later elections were celebrated and the Third Republic of Ghana was inaugurated.[2]

The situation in the History Department is not easy to assess, due to lack of information on the period. However, the information that survives highlights some of the problems. Student numbers, for example, give a very mixed picture. The number of students going into the BA General degree in the History Department remained almost the same between 1969/70 and 1974/75. However, the number of students going into the BA Honours showed a sharp decline.[3] This shows that fewer students were going into graduate education, potentially reducing the number of professional historians.

This does not tell the whole story. In his recollections of the period Professor Addo-Fenning complements this view. The 1970s were a difficult time for teachers at the university. Many teachers left the department and moved to other universities either in Africa or the United States. This had a dramatic effect on the teaching loads of those who stayed. Historians had less and less time for research

[2] Agbodeka, F. *A history of the University of Ghana.* 1998. pp. 225-228.

[3] Numbers compiled from the University of Ghana. *Annual Report.* 1964/65-1974/75.

and the lively seminars that had reflected the dynamic intellectual life of the Department soon became something of the past.[4]

In addition to this, the economic crisis also hit the libraries. It became more difficult to keep abreast with international publications. Libraries could not afford books and journals. In a rapidly changing field like African History, this dealt a serious blow to local research. Publishing locally also became more difficult. The *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* could not continue to be published and this limited the possibilities for local historians to publish their work. Addo-Fenning remembers that publishing in international journals was also difficult because their editors said that their concerns were too local for wider audiences.[5] The high costs of publishing locally and the obstacles for publishing abroad made it virtually impossible for younger generations of historians to significantly advance their careers. Thus, their morale and commitment to the field was seriously affected.

The teaching program and the research concerns of the Department were also affected. In previous years it had been able to provide a wide range of subjects from African History to the History of India at the undergraduate and Honours level. The departure of so many members of staff made it impossible to maintain these offerings.[6] Moreover, the lack of staff made it also difficult to introduce new ideas and approaches. The political history of the different groups that constituted Ghana remained the main area of research, at the expense of social and intellectual history. The Legon History Department remained strongly committed to the notion of nation-building that had been so important in the development of African History in the previous decade.

"It is my firm conviction that a good knowledge of the past, of the different groups composing the states, of their cultures and institutions, and of their roots will promote mutual respect and understanding which will break down the barriers of fear, suspicion and distrust that keep the various groups apart. As Professor Ajayi has put it: 'Increased knowledge of the actual state and development of the cultures of different African peoples in the past will not foretell the future, but it will provide understanding.'"[7]

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[4] Interview with R. Addo-Fenning. April 22, 1999.

[5] *Ibidem.*

[6] *Ibidem.*

[7] Boahen, A.A. *Clio and nation-building.* 1974. p.11.

The roots of this commitment lie both in the practical circumstances of the department and in the intellectual history of Ghana. First of all, the political history of local polities was viable in the restricted conditions that historians had to face.[8] They were able to use oral history and local archives and they did not have to learn and apply new skills. Secondly, looking back at the intellectual history of the Gold Coast and Ghana one finds a long history of nationalism that was still exerting a big influence on Ghanaian historians. In his analysis of John Mensah Sarbah's work, Baku argues that: "...he initiated a radical tradition of Gold Coast historical writing which still exerts seminal influence on modern Ghanaian socio-historical and political studies."[9] The quest to "Africanize" African History through the study of political history remained a strong activity in Legon, not only because of the practical difficulties in incorporating new ideas, but also because there was still a concern with understanding the political history of the different groups that had become the new nation of Ghana.

In contrast with this relative continuity at Legon, the History Department at Dar es Salaam experienced radical changes during this period, changes that were also closely related to the political and social situation in the country. Until 1970, the University College of Dar es Salaam had been part of the University of East Africa. Given the political upheaval in the region, this arrangement was dissolved. In August 1970, the President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, inaugurated the University of Dar es Salaam. This new status brought changes that coincided with the debates emanating from the Arusha declaration. A process of re-structuring several areas of the university was initiated. Among those affected was the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, home to the History Department.

The reorganisation of the faculty, as that of the rest of the university, had one guiding principle: to adapt the activities of the university to the man-power needs of the country. To achieve this, two elements were introduced: First, a core of interdisciplinary courses was created. All students were required to take these courses (with the exception of students doing education). The courses, called East

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[8] Much of this research was made by BA and MA students who were encouraged to do local histories of their communities of origin. These were not theoretically oriented and were quite parochial in their interests. However, university staff became more and more dependent on these works.

[9] Baku, D.E.K. "History and national development, the case of John Mensah Sarbah and the reconstruction of Gold Coast history." *Institute of African Studies Research Review.* 6, (1), 1990. pp.36-37.

African Society and Environment I, II, and III, were presented as an introduction to the social and political problems that had shaped the societies of East Africa. Students were told of the history of the region and the world context that had affected it. They were also provided with information about the uses of science and technology for development and they studied East Africa's developmental policies and strategies.[10]

The second element introduced as part of the Faculty reorganisation were new course combinations based on the traditional disciplines. According to the new scheme students joining the Faculty would have to choose between three streams: a) Economic based, b) Social science based, and c) Education and Arts.[11] These changes reveal the commitment of the Faculty and the University to address the social and economic problems of the country, and set the agenda of "development" at the centre of university concerns.[12]

The new scheme, however, presented some problems for the History Department. As part of the leading educational institution in Tanzania it had a dual role. First, it had to train teachers. Second, it needed to encourage and produce research that could be used at other levels of education. As concerns with relevance and development increased, the training of teachers took precedence over research. This had a detrimental effect on the value given to professional historical research. In the academic year of 1973-74 the department introduced a M.A. course that was mainly aimed at contributing to the training of secondary school teachers.[13] Some students managed to continue onto graduate education, however, these needed government authorisation. For example, in 1971/72 the departmental report stated: "... the department has made representations, both to the University and the Ministry of Education, for provision for more graduates, especially Tanzanian, secondary school teachers; to undertake research and to register as graduate students of the university."[14]

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[10] University of Dar es Salaam. *Annual Report.* 1971/72. pp.15-17.

[11] *Ibidem.*

[12] Kimambo, I. & A.G. Ishumi. "Twenty years of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences: a critical review." Seminar paper. History Department, University of Dar es Salaam. [n.d.]

[13] University of Dar es Salaam. *Annual Report.* 1972/73. pp.26-27.

[14] University of Dar es Salaam. *Annual Report.* 1971/72. pp.22-23.

It was in this climate that another policy aimed at adapting the activities of the university to the policies of the country came into operation. In November 1974 the National Executive Committee of TANU made the decision to restructure the educational system in Tanzania. The Musoma resolution, the document that resulted from this decision, stated, among other things, that a new system of admissions into higher education be implemented. According to the new system, students leaving secondary education would have to go directly into work, and universities could only accept students who had some years of working experience.

The need of the History Department to justify its existence in the midst of all these changes is evident in an editorial in *Tanzania Zamani*, commenting on the Musoma resolution:

"How will the teaching of history in this university fit into the new arrangements? If workers are to be sent to the University to improve their technical capacities to work, how will historians help them to do this?...History is a technical subject if it assists in problem solving. Our study of world history produces both solutions and undesirable paths by example from other countries. Our study of African History should help workers to understand the historical forces which have shaped the problems Africans now face...."[15]

Despite the increasing problems of training young historians, the 1970's did not see any serious staffing problems. This shows the good reputation of the History Department at Dar. It was still able to attract an important number of expatriates to complement local staff. It is even more remarkable in the context of a University that was beginning to experience serious problems in recruiting both local and expatriate staff. Despite the efforts of the University to africanise its staff, there was still a need for overseas personnel. Unfortunately, the economic problems made this more and more difficult. By the end of the decade, it was no longer able to maintain competitive conditions of service for overseas staff. Even more unfortunate was the fact that even local staff began to leave university service for more profitable jobs.[16]

Fortunately for the History Department, it benefited from its reputation and also from the intellectual climate of the time, which very much favoured the

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[15] "Editorial." *Tanzania Zamani*.16, 1975. p.1.

[16] University of Dar es Salaam. *Annual Report*. 1980-81. p.4.

intellectual changes that members of the department were introducing. At the beginning of the decade there were 14 permanent members the majority of who were Tanzanians.[17] Most of the historians who had collaborated with Ranger in the previous decade had already left. The new department had I. Kimambo as its senior figure. He was helped by A. Temu, I. Katoke, W. Rodney, D. Birmingham, J. Sutton, G. Gwassa, D. Bowles, M.A. Sheriff, B. Swai, M. Kaniki, F. Kaijage, and N. Karoma. From this initial group, Birmingham and Sutton left in 1973; Bowles and Rodney left in 1975, and Kaniki in 1979. Some new members joined the department, among them were J. Depelchin in 1975 (left in 1978/79), H.G. Slater and E. Wamba-dia-Wamba in 1979-80. In contrast to what had happened in Legon, Dar es Salaam benefited from the arrival of new members who were likely attracted by the intellectual and political environment.

The new intellectual priorities can also be appreciated in the changes introduced in undergraduate teaching. A new syllabus was not introduced until 1979; however, some changes were made to the courses already on offer. Some courses that were introduced during this period were the Economic History of Tanzania, Black Peoples in the Americas, Capitalism and Imperialism, and the Philosophy and Methodology of History.[18] Most of these were also incorporated within the new syllabus. Take for example the course on Philosophy and Methodology of History as described in the University calendar:

"This course is intended to examine the historian's craft with the aid of two problematics: liberal and scientific. It is also intended to show the inadequacy of the liberal problematic to produce concrete history. Thus the aim is to show the superiority of the scientific problematic which is monistic over the liberal one. The rise and institutionalization of African History will be used as a basis of illustration. The course is divided in two parts. The first part is intended to critically delineate the physiognomy of African postcolonial historiography. Having shown the euphoria which accompanied the rise of post-colonial historiography, it is intended to show that African History is now in crisis. This crisis is not accidental. Rather it is a reflection of deeper crisis within African postcolonial social formations which African History was intended to legitimize. The second part of the course will show the relevance of the scientific method in solving the crisis. The various concepts necessary on the writing of scientific history will be discussed, and the possibility of writing scientific history shown."[19]

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[17] University of Dar es Salaam. *Calendar*. 1970/71/72. p. 73.

[18] University of Dar es Salaam. *Annual Report*. 1973/74 and 78/79.

[19] University of Dar es Salaam. *Calendar*. 1980-81. p.149.

This is an example of the radical but inarticulate criticism that the New Dar School was formulating. The History Department at Dar es Salaam came to be known for this kind of attack on the new African History. According to H. Slater, the 1970s represented a transitional period from the traditional "Nationalist" approaches of the Ranger era to the "Socialist" based approaches of the 1980s. This period saw the beginnings of a process of constructing what Slater called a "post-nationalist" historiography that was at the core of what came to be called the "New Dar School."[20]

The first stages of this transformation came with the publication of Rodney's influential book *How Europe underdeveloped Africa.*[21] Walter Rodney, a Guyananese who had done his graduate training at SOAS, had a significant impact in Dar es Salaam. His work arrived at a time when the need for a new approach was being felt. It introduced important ideas for the construction of such new approaches.[22] Rodney's book introduced two elements. First, the idea that African History was failing to acknowledge and explain the conditions of poverty in which most Africans were living. In his view, historians of Africa had to analyse the roots of African underdevelopment that derived from Africa's unequal participation in the world economy. The analysis of this phenomenon called for a new understanding of colonialism and neo-colonialism as the main historical forces behind the underdevelopment of Africa. The second element was his use of a particular social science theory in his interpretation of history. He had been influenced by the underdevelopment theory that was being used in the study of Latin American history.[23]

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[20] Slater, H. "Dar es Salaam and the post-nationalist historiography of Africa." Jewsiewicki, B. & D. Newbury (eds.) *African historiographies: What history for which Africa?* 1986. p.262.

[21] Rodney, W. *How Europe underdeveloped Africa.* Dar es Salaam, Tanzania Publishing House, 1972.

[22] Kimambo, I. *Three decades of production of historical knowledge at Dar es Salaam.* Dar es Salaam, Dar es Salaam University Press, 1993. p.9.

[23] It is worth reflecting on the importance of Latin American scholarship in the introduction of underdevelopment theory in African History. Latin American scholars started to develop underdevelopment theory and other Marxist approaches to history since the 1920s. As African historians, Latin American scholars were concerned with issues of poverty and inequality. However they were in a very different position to that of African scholars. First, there theorising was very much a result of the increasing industrialisation process that many Latin American countries experienced during the first half of the century. This process produced not only the possibility of analysing things such as class relations, it also gave way to the emergence of a Leftist intelligentsia within a climate of intense ideological debate. Africa's industrialisation process was relatively recent and the scholarly debates on issues of historical interpretation and development were still at very early stages.

As the decade progressed, the criticism against "nationalist" historiography became the central concern among members of the History Department in Dar es Salaam. In the construction of this critique one can identify different positions. The first one was mainly represented by Slater, Depelchin and Swai. Their critique distinguished two historical traditions, Bourgeois and proletarian. They argued that the problem with the previous historiography had been its "bourgeois" background, and that it lacked the essential methodological tools for a meaningful analysis of the African past.[24] Together with this criticism there was a strong drive towards the construction of a new methodology capable of producing a History that reflected Africa's participation in the world-economy and the proletarian character of history. The main figures in this effort were Henry Bernstein[25] and Jaques Depelchin who devoted much of their writing to define the elements of Marxist theory for the study of African History.[26] The views expressed in their works came to be characteristic of the Dar es Salaam History Department. In the words of Kimambo: "When Josiah Mlahagwa stated in 1978 that the Department had found a methodological basis for producing appropriate 'proletarian-oriented' history of Africa, he was probably giving the view of the majority."[27] Unfortunately, what the department really found was a poorly theorised approach that had little; if nothing to say to the proletarian masses it was allegedly aimed for.

Towards the end of the decade, however, criticism against the uses and abuses of Marxist theory was mounting. In an article published in 1978, Robin Law criticised the way in which Marxist historians had attempted to analyse the African

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[24] One can read this formula in many of the seminar papers and writings of members of the department during this period. See for example: Slater, H. "Africa and the production of historical knowledge" Seminar paper. Department of History, University of Dar es Salaam. 1980.,Swai, B. "The use of history: towards a sociology of Africanist historiography". Mimeo. University of Dar es Salaam, Department of History. 1980., and Swai, B. "Local initiative and African History: a critique." *Tanzania Zamani.* 20, 1977. Pp. 11-19.

[25] It is important to notice that Bernstein was not a historian but a sociologist. This is an example of the pressure put by the social sciences on historians to adopt methods that were then perceived as more scientific and more relevant for the study of the African past.

[26] Bernstein, H. "Marxism and African History: Endre Sik and his critics." *Kenya Historical Review.*4, (1), 1976. pp. 1-21., Depelchin, J. "Towards a problematic history of Africa." *Tanzania Zamani.* 18, 1975. pp.1-9., Depelchin, J. "The coming of age of political economy in African studies." *International Journal of African historical studies.* 11, (1), 1978. pp.711-720.

[27] Kimambo, I. *Op.cit.* 1993. p.14.

precolonial past. Talking about the attempts to understand the economic structures of pre-capitalist societies he said:

"These reformulations are, no doubt, evidence of a commendable flexibility in adapting Marxist theory to accommodate new data, but there seems some danger that the notion of economic determination will become so diluted that it will cease to be of any heuristic value in the analysis of any particular historical problem. We seem already to be close to the point at which the revision of the theory serves more to evade the prospect of empirical refutation than to improve understanding of the data to which it is applied."[28]

The work done in the History Department in Dar es Salaam was a perfect example of this tendency to evade empirical refutation by hiding behind theoretical debates. Many so-called Marxist historians, and particularly historians in Dar es Salaam, had criticised the historiography of the 1960s for having fetishised empirical data. However, this new generation of historians was fetishising theory and often ignoring the data.

The sterile discussions that appeared in Dar es Salaam are proof of the problems that emerge when historical research is evaluated by social values i.e. when any kind of history is justified by the fact that it is allegedly for the benefit of a dispossessed social group. A representative figure of this is E. Wamba-dia-Wamba, a philosopher from the then Central Republic of Congo. Wamba's early writings criticised Bernstein's and Depelchin division between bourgeois and materialist history. He argued that proletarian history could only be possible if the transformation of society was also achieved. From his perspective, Bernstein's and Depelchin's interpretation was still firmly rooted on an idealist paradigm.

"The problem of African historiography becomes the fact that, failing to make an analysis of the present society (African society in capitalism- its specificity i.e. its specific mode of socialty), it wants to grasp its past outside of the specificity of the historical laws of the present society through which, by opposition, the past could be reconstructed. Of course, by form of socialty (in its colonial and post-colonial phases) imposes itself on African historical studies. Colonialists or post-colonial 'bourgeoisies' cannot give us other 'pasts' than those expressed through the civilizing mission of Europe or the African local initiative. The orientation African historiography takes i.e., assuming that the past is given and that its

[28] Law, R.C.C. "In search of a Marxist perspective on pre-colonial Africa." *Journal of African History.* 19, (3), 1978. p. 449.

understanding is the key to that of the present is fundamentally empiricist and idealist."[29]

Wamba-dia-Wamba's arguments are obviously the result of a wider disenchantment with the results of socialists policies in Tanzania towards the end of the 1970s. They represented a critique of the fact that the new so-called proletarian history was not reflecting the concerns of the wider population. This was supposedly history from below that had no impact whatsoever on the lives of the proletarian classes. However, it is very unlikely that his discourse would be appealing to the proletarian masses or would make any difference to their quality of life. Wamba's reflections are little more than rhetoric with little value for our understanding of the problems of Marxist or African historiography.

Historians at Dar es Salaam were convinced that the Marxist method was not only more "scientific", but also a more "relevant" form of historical knowledge. Unfortunately, this belief was not backed by a body of historical research. The decade of the 1970s saw very few publications by members of the History Department. Most seminar papers continued to focus on matters of theory. The vast majority of empirical research was done by MA students who applied the political economy formula to their data. Moreover, the emphasis on theory resulted in the alienation of the historians from the communities they were writing about. This underlines the paradox of a history for the people that managed to ignore the people.

In his reflections on the development of the History Department, Kimambo mentioned a "psychological" fear among the staff. This was probably due to the difficult political circumstances that affected the University towards the end of the decade. The increasing intervention of the Government in the running of the University was creating a tense situation and historians might have felt that the discussion of theory was safer than the actual analysis of the past.[30] The general climate of the university and the country make this theory quite plausible. There is, however, little evidence of direct intervention from the government in the activities of the History Department. Ironically, the political situation of Tanzania

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[29] Wamba-dia-Wamba, E. "Brief theoretical comments on the 'Quest for materialist history', concerning the article 'The object of African History; a materialist perspective' by H. Bernstein and J. Depelchin." Seminar paper. University of Dar es Salaam, History Department.[n.d]. p. 24.

[30] Kimambo, I. *Op.cit.* 1993. p.15.

became both a fertile ground and a graveyard for the study of African History in Dar es Salaam. It allowed historians to justify their work with the rhetoric of a Marxist history-from-below, which at the same time allowed them to dwell on questions such as the definition of bourgeois historiography or the problematics of liberal and scientific histories, at the expense of the study of local communities.

"From the historians point of view,"- said Kimambo,- "the two decades of debating theory did mean lost opportunity [sic] to produce historical knowledge for almost a whole generation."[31] This sense of a "lost opportunity" is even stronger if one compares it with what happened in Legon. Dar es Salaam managed to maintain a good level of staff and a lively intellectual discussion in the midst of economic and social decline. It is certainly a pity that such achievement did not produce a larger output of historical research that had the potential for being very influential in the development of the field. Paradoxically, the attempts of the department to produce a more relevant history resulted in an abstract and obscure theoretical debate, and a lack of production of historical research.

The cases of Legon and Dar es Salaam reveal the emergence of significant problems for the development of African History. The lack of funding, the decline of living standards, increased teaching loads, and lack of academic freedom were all responsible for the decline of research in African universities. The economic and political crisis also encouraged the view that History was not a field that could make a significant contribution to the solution of problems that affected Africa. The case of Dar es Salaam is also an example of how historians tried to overturn this view by developing a Marxist methodology that could be perceived as more relevant instead of investing their resources in local research. This did little to improve the standing of African History among other historians or among the general public.

B) African and South African History at UCT.

In contrast to the difficult situation in many African universities, South African institutions were going through a relatively prosperous period. This coincided with a strong revival of political opposition to the Apartheid regime. History, in

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[31] *Ibidem.*

these circumstances, was able to retain and even increase its relevance among wider sections of the population. This was due to the many transformations that occurred in South African historiography during the 1970s. Much of the work that contributed to these changes was initially done outside South Africa. By the end of the decade, the impact was also being strongly felt in South African universities. The University of the Witswatersrand was particularly important in the emergence of a revolution in South African History inside South Africa. In the second part of this chapter I will look at the contributions of the Wits History Workshop to the wider transformations in South African History. Here I will concentrate in the impact felt at UCT.

UCT's History Department remained at the margins of what was seen as a radical revolution in the study of the South African past. This did not mean that no change occurred among members of the History Department. On the contrary, this was a period of constant change and growth. The question that arises then is why these changes did not follow the historiographical patterns that were transforming the rest of the field.

UCT, as most South African universities, was relatively isolated from the rest of the African continent. In 1979 Sir Richard Luyt, Vice-Chancellor of the University visited a number of African universities and commented on the difficulty of arranging academic exchanges with them. He expressed his sorrow that there were so few contacts, and that the possibilities to build those contacts were very limited.

"I had visited universities that have developed greatly since my own days in these territories, universities that are now humming with activity and ambition. They are going places fast and the world is helping them to go there, i.e. the world except South Africa. Some of these universities have special relationships with the universities of the older world, one at least that of Ghana is twinned with a university in Canada, Guelph University. We have no place in all this and they have no links with us even though for some of their research and post-graduate work conditions in South Africa are more relevant that those which they find in America, Britain and Europe where they go instead...By 10 am I was back in Cape Town on a perfect winter's day all too aware that I was back in a society that would neither know, think much upon, or spare a care for the universities that I found so fascinating and so vibrant in the other lands of our own continent."[32]

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[32] Transcript of Sir Richard Luyt's African Tour, 27 June- 21 July 1971. *Sir Richard Luyt Papers*. UCT. p.162.

The isolation of UCT and other South African institutions partly explains why the fields of African and South African History were poorly integrated. This reinforced the view that the South African past was exceptional and unique, and that African History was not relevant for its understanding. There were other dimensions to this problem. For obvious political reasons, the study of African History was not an integral part of the teaching of history at primary and secondary levels. This posed a significant problem for universities that were mainly charged with training teachers and supporting those levels of education. Therefore, the integration of an area such as African History in the main curriculum was not seen as important or relevant.

A look at some of the changes introduced in UCT during the 1970s reveals attempts to deal with this issue in a more systematic way. The results of these attempts may not seem very radical given the wider changes occurring at the time. However, they should be acknowledged. We saw in the last chapter that a course on African History was introduced in UCT in 1964, mainly from the initiative of Eric Axelson and the influence of people such as Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson. The course had been very popular among students. Since its creation, its numbers went from 23 to 60 in 1972, and 119 enrolled for 1973.[33]

Since the end of the 1960s, Axelson had been heavily involved in the administration of the Faculty of Arts. A.M. Davey took over the running of the Department, and in 1973 he proposed the introduction of a second course in African History. This proposal, however, was only for an extension of the current status of African History and not for a better integration of the course in the History First or Honours degree. As Davey said in his letter to the Dean: "Within our first, second and third year courses in History it was and it is not feasible, in the African context, to go beyond the limits of South African History and a paper on some aspects of the European colonial empires."[34] This shows that despite the increasing interest in African History, this remained a subject separated from the core course in history at UCT.

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[33] A.M. Davey to Dean. June 25, 1973. Dean's Circular, July 12, 1973. *Transactions of the Board of the Faculty of Arts*. UCT.

[34] *Ibidem.*

To understand this situation, one has to remember the difficult political and social circumstances of the time. As it was mentioned before, there were strict regulations about which subjects could be included as part of the curriculum for History majors. Howard Phillips was at some point involved in the teaching of the course of African History, and he reminds us that most of the students that took this course were not history majors.[35] On the other hand, African History was very appealing for students. It was a breath of fresh air in the suffocating environment of apartheid South Africa. It was another way to rebel against the establishment and some young white South Africans also saw it as a form of looking for a new identity as white Africans.[36]

In addition to this interest in African History, the department was also fortunate to secure the services of Robin Hallet in 1972, when Axelson became assistant principal. In that year, Robin Hallet took over the teaching of African History. The arrival of a new head of department in 1976, Colin de B. Webb, threatened Hallet's position because his post was held against the funds left available by the retirement of Axelson. Webb, however, aware of the importance of Hallet in the department, wrote to the Board to request an additional senior lectureship. The Board granted a three year contract and Hallet remained in UCT until 1978.[37] Hallet is remembered by many members of the department as an inspiring and intellectually exciting man. Howard Phillips described him as the main intellectual figure of that period.[38] He took the study of African History at UCT closer to what was being taught in African, American and European universities, and increased the awareness among historians about what was happening in other parts of the continent. Despite Hallet's intellectual influence, the integration of African and South African History required significant structural changes. Some were introduced in this period, but the slowness of the process highlights the political difficulties of introducing major transformations.

Colin de B. Webb, the new head of department, promoted a number of changes to the curriculum that encouraged the study of African History. In doing this he was

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[35] Interview with H. Phillips. December 11, 1998.

[36] Interview with P. Harries. January 20, 1999.

[37] C. de B. Webb to the Registrar. July 29, 1975. Minute October 7, 1975. *Transactions of the Board of the Faculty of Arts*. UCT.

[38] Interview with H. Phillips. December 11, 1998. Interview with P. Harries. January 20, 1999. Interview with A. Davie and E.van Heynigen. December 4, 1998.

probably taking up the concerns of members of staff, although he was also taking firm control of the development of this controversial area.[39] In 1978, for example he proposed some changes in the regulations that would allow students of African History to proceed to a history Honours.

"Since my arrival here I have been worried by the fact that students with credits in African History I and II are debarred, under present regulations, from proceeding to History Honours unless they have majored in History. Students who develop a strong interest in History after registering for African History I in their second year of study thus find themselves in an academic *cul de sac*, and some of our most promising young scholars are lost to us...."[40]

Webb proposed more changes after having been elected Deputy Dean in 1980. He moved for a revision of the history syllabus that had among its main purposes:

"1. - to enable senior History students to take half-course in African History during their second or third year of study;
2. - to enable African History students to include a half-course in South African History in their curricula;
3. - to provide, on a more general level, for greater flexibility in the matter of constructing curricula from the various courses offered within the department...."[41]

These changes did not have an immediate effect on the research priorities of the department or on the training of graduate students. However, they did increase the awareness among younger members of the problematic separation between African and South African History, and on the advantages of bridging that gap. On a different level, the changes in the curriculum also reveal other trends that were affecting the History Department. Particularly important in this regard were the relative increases in student and staff numbers. Without these, the changes described above would have been more difficult to introduce.

While students in Dar es Salaam and Legon were apparently losing interest in history, student numbers in Cape Town were increasing. The number of

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[39] The intentions and attitudes of Webb towards the area of African History are not clear. It is quite clear from the documentation that he was a clever administrator, and as such, he was also probably very aware of the dangers involved in the teaching of African History. It is not surprising then that he was both trying to encourage it and also trying to control it.

[40] C.de B. Webb to Dean, May 2, 1978. Agenda May 9, 1978. *Transactions of the Board of the Faculty of Arts*. UCT.

[41] Webb, C. de B. "Syllabus revision and consequential prospectus amendments." June 13, 1980. Dean's Circular September 9, 1980. *Transactions of the Board of the Faculty of Arts*. UCT.

undergraduate enrolments went from 367 in 1968 to 496 in 1978. Postgraduate students went from 12 to 23 in the same period.[42] It is particularly important to emphasise the increase in graduate students, because this is a relatively good indicator of the health of historical research at any given time.

The problem of understaffing had been endemic at UCT. However, the 1970s saw some improvements in this area. More important than the increase in the size of the establishment were the new interests of the people who joined the department during this period. Young historians, like H. Phillips, P. Harries, E. van Heynigen and C. Saunders, were influenced by Hallet and his approaches to African History.

However, Hallet's impact at UCT is not clearly reflected in the research output of the department. A look at the *Reports on publications and research* in this period reveals a very mixed story. One can find traditional topics on political history such as the Eastern separatism and Cape Politics researched by B.A. le Cordeur. C. de B. Webb was concerned with Zulu history and was busy with a project on The James Stuart Archive. Saunders continued with mainly political history, although he introduced some social and African elements with works such as Black leaders in Southern African History and his research on Nguni history. The most significant change was the introduction of social and urban history, first by Hallet and then adopted by other members and research students. Hallet's arrival in Cape Town roughly coincided with the fact that a number of archival sources were transferred there.[43] He was also influenced by the social revolts that occurred in Cape Town in 1972.[44] Because of these, Hallet saw that historians were sitting in a community that was under-researched and that offered a wealth of material for its study. During his time at UCT he researched topics such as crime and society in Cape Town in the 1890s, and P.A.C. in Cape Town in 1960. Other members of the department started to look to social history in South Africa in general, but also produced some work related specifically to Cape Town. Howard Phillips did research on the impact of the Spanish flu epidemic in South Africa and followed it by an article entitled "Black October: Cape Town and the Spanish

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[42] C. de B. Webb to Dean. May 12, 1978. Staffing priorities, 1978: Application for lectureship, department of history. *Transactions of the Board of the Faculty of Arts*. UCT.

[43] Interview with A. Davie and E. van Heynigen. December 4, 1998.

[44] Interview with H. Phillips. December 11, 1998.

Influeza Epidemic of 1918."[45] Towards the end of the decade Patrick Harries also introduced some innovative research on migrant labour with works such as "The Immigration of an African community to the Western Cape, 1876-1882."[46] MA and PhD theses on the social history of Cape Town also started to become popular. For example, E. Bradlow's PhD thesis "Immigration into the Union, 1910-1948. Policies and attitudes;" V.C. Malherbe's MA thesis "Diversification and mobility of Khoikhoi labour in the eastern districts of the Cape Colony prior to the labour law of November 1, 1809," and V. Bickford-Smith's MA dissertation "Immigration in Cape Town."[47]

These works reveal a significant change in the research interests of members of the History Department. This transformation did not affect everybody; but it did introduce a wider variety of topics and approaches. Despite this, however, it is worth pointing out two issues. First, it is somewhat paradoxical that Hallet's influence among members did not result in a large increase in the study of Africa as a whole. Generally, this is not a unique pattern. Universities do tend to concentrate on the history of their own countries and regions. However, in the case of South African History this was due to the political conditions and not for merely economic or academic reasons. In reality, the difficulties faced by South African historians wishing to carry on research on African countries were monumental. Moreover, there were institutional and structural problems in introducing the topic in South Africa.[48] Although the influence of teachers like Hallet produced significant changes, I think it is fair to say that the strictures of the apartheid educational system and a widely sustained view on South African particularism made it more difficult for African History to flourish at UCT.

A second question is what was happening to the radical tradition at UCT? By looking at the research by members of the department, it is easy to see that the influence of radical historiography was very marginal. As Howard Phillips put it,

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[45] Phillips, H. "Black October: Cape Town and the Spanish Influenza Epidemic of 1918." *Studies in the history of Cape Town.* 1, 1979.

[46] Harries, P. "The Immigration of an African community to the Western Cape 1876-1882." *Studies in the history of Cape Town.* 1, 1979.

[47] University of Cape Town. *Report on publications and research in the University.* 1969-1980.

[48] One way in which Hallet tried to encourage teaching and research on African History was by using the Students' Visiting Lecturer Fund to invite historians of Africa from Western universities.

they did not turn their backs on new trends, they simply remained observant.[49] Some historians remember a tension between radical and liberal historians, although it is difficult to explain why the radical tradition did not have a larger impact. Historians like Patrick Harries, whose work was very closely linked to the History Workshop at Wits, did not feel he was completely part of that movement. Although trained at SOAS, he had not studied under Shula Marks, but with David Birmingham, and, at his return, he had gone to UCT instead of Wits.[50] It was also argued that much of the work developed at the History Workshop was the result of the specific social and economic circumstances of the Rand. In this respect, the work of Van Onselen, which will be looked at later, gained great recognition in the radical historiography.[51] Historians in Cape Town, however, were then more concerned with other forms of social and urban history. There was also the feeling of a disciplinary and institutional division. Historians that embraced the radical tradition did not go to the History Department, but to the Economic History Department. The strong Marxist element that characterised the radical tradition in its early stages quite probably put off many historians with more traditional training.[52] All these opinions point to issues of training, hiring policies, and local concerns. There is little evidence that historians at UCT were hired because of their ideological position. However, it is not unlikely to think that, given the difficult political situation, it might have been easier to secure appointments of people whose training and background was in line with the mainstream history practised in the department. To prove this, however, would require more evidence and a detailed understanding of the conditions that allowed other departments, like Economic History, or other Universities like Wits, to incorporate the radical tradition.

Changes introduced in the History Department, although limited, did have a wider influence in the standing of African studies at UCT. This decade saw a revival in this area, and staff members were closely involved in this process. In May 1975, Prof. Van der Merwe wrote to the Dean of the Faculty: "For some time now there has been a groundswell of interest in 'doing something about African

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[49] Interview with H. Phillips. December 11, 1998.

[50] Interview with P. Harries. January 20, 1999.

[51] Interview with V. Bickford-Smith. November 27, 1998.

[52] Interview with C.C. Saunders. December 3, 1998. Interview with A. Davie and E. van Heynigen. December 4, 1998.

studies' at administrative, staff and student levels in the university."[53] As a result of this renewed interest, members of a number of departments, both staff and students, formed a committee to co-ordinate academic activities related to African studies. As part of its efforts, the committee proposed the expansion of the School of African Studies. This was to be achieved through the creation of a Board of African Studies that would be formed by members of staff and students and would be charged to "co-ordinate coherent, fully integrated course programmes in African studies and to co-ordinate, plan and promote Africanist research in the university."[54] The creation of this Board was recommended by the Faculty and finally approved.

From these early recommendations it is possible to appreciate the changes experienced in the area of African studies at UCT. The Board of African Studies was conceived as a revival of the old School of African Studies, but a much improved version of it. The plans and constitution of the Board emerged and developed at an impressive speed. From the proposals for a committee in late 1974, in September 1975 the Board was discussing the creation of a Centre for African Studies. This Centre would exist outside the structure of the existing faculties and would concentrate on post-graduate training. It would also help in the co-ordination and promotion of research by members of staff, and would also promote academic exchanges with other African countries. In contrast with the old School of African Studies, the new Centre would be founded on a broad conception of African studies. In other words, African studies would not only be understood as the African population of South Africa but as its constitution said: "the word 'African' should be understood to include all inhabitants of the African continent."[55]

The initial role of the Centre of African Studies was that of co-ordinating the study of Africa in different departments. However, in the following years it would also promote a debate on the nature, direction and purpose of African studies. This debate would force scholars at UCT to reflect upon the potential

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[53] Memorandum from Prof. N.J. van der Merwe to Dean. October 18, 1974. Agenda for October 29, 1974. *Transactions of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* UCT.

[54] Memorandum from Prof. Van der Merwe to Dean. October 25, 1974. Agenda October 29, 1974. *Transactions of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* UCT.

[55] Board of African Studies. "Constitution and terms of reference." Minute September 10, 1975. *Transactions of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* UCT.

contributions from South Africa to the study of Africa, and thus to the rethinking of South African exceptionalism.

C) African History at SOAS.

The 1970s in Britain were a decade of mixed fortunes for those interested in African History. Many centres around the country reported increases in student numbers and personnel, and the quality of the debates was certainly high.[56] Unfortunately, this period also saw the beginning of an economic crisis that put a brake on any further growth in the field, and raised difficult questions in terms of its role in the British educational system. This did not appear evident until the end of the decade when student numbers decreased and the job situation for graduates turned bleaker.

At the beginning of the 1970s social unrest among students that had plagued Western Europe and North America was also felt in Great Britain. The disorders caused by this, compounded by the stringent economic situation, had an adverse effect on the expansion and development of British universities in general, and SOAS was no exception.

In his report for the academic year of 1973-74 the Director, Prof. Phillips, talked about the crisis that had hit the School in particular and the university in general.

"In the short period of a year the financial quinquennial prospects of British universities have undergone a dramatic transformation. In my Survey last year, which appropriately greeted with satisfaction the very favourable block recurrent grant for this quinquennium which the School had just received, I said 'from a prolonged sojourn in the stony desert, we have emerged suddenly into what by comparison seems land of flowing milk and honey.' I spoke too soon, for the severity of the national crisis has thrown the immediate financial future of British universities into question, and inflation has begun to undermine the School's economic position."[57]

Unfortunately, this would be the tone for the next fifteen years. The expansion of the School seriously suffered in most areas. Undergraduate studies were

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[56] McCracken, J. "African History in British universities; Past, present and future." *African Affairs*. 92, 1993. pp. 240-241.

[57] "Director's Survey." SOAS. *Report of the Governing Body, Statement of Accounts and Departmental Reports*.1973-74. p.5.

particularly affected. Ironically, the crisis hit the School in a moment when it had the capacity to provide education for more students. In 1971 Roland Oliver was appointed senior tutor. He and his colleagues examined the possibility of increasing the capacity of the School. This was then possible due to the completion of the new building that offered extra space. Unfortunately, as things started to look brighter, the Government prevented universities from accepting more students to limit expenditure.[58] This was a particularly sad situation given the long struggle that SOAS had to increase the number of undergraduate students.[59]

At the undergraduate level, the History Department tried to put more emphasis in interdisciplinary training. This was reflected by the introduction of joint degrees (African History and Social anthropology, and African Language and history). This gave students a broader education that made them more attractive to employers. It also set down some foundations for those intending to continue onto graduate work and, potentially, made SOAS more attractive to undergraduates. The need to attract undergraduate students would be an important trend in years to come, and a particular problem of SOAS.

Attracting post-graduates, on the other hand, had never been a problem. Graduate research was particularly productive during this period. African History seemed to be well received both among Master and research students.[60] Oliver remembers this period as the most prolific in the training of doctoral candidates.[61] He counted forty from countries such as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Uganda, Ethiopia, Zaire, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Sudan, Zambia, the United States, Canada, Israel, and Guyana.[62] An approximate total of 46 degrees appear to have been granted between 1970/71 and 1979/80.[63]

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[58] Oliver, R. *In the realms of gold.* 1997. pp. 343-344.

[59] SOAS. *Report of the Governing Body, Statement of Accounts and Departmental Reports.* 1971-72. pp.104-105.

[60] *Ibidem.*

[61] Oliver, R. *Op.cit.* 1997. p.330.

[62] *Ibidem.*

[63] This is a calculation based on the information on degrees granted in the SOAS. *Report of the Governing Body, Statement of Accounts and Departmental Reports.* 1970/71-1979/80.

A look at the titles of students' dissertations reveals the still important role of SOAS in the training of scholars in a number of areas. Some examples are: Phyllis Mary Martin, "The external trade of the Loango coast and its effects on the Vili, 1576-1870;" Ray Arthur Kea, "Trade, state formation and warfare in the Gold Coast, 1600-1826;" Ian Linden, "The White Fathers' Mission in Rwanda: 1900-1932;" among many others. Particularly important in this period were the works of a number of young scholars whose contribution transformed the study of South African History such as J.J. Guy "The destruction of the Zulu kingdom; the civil war in Zululand, 1879-1884;" P.L. Bonner "The emergence, consolidation and disintegration of Dhlamini power in Swaziland 1820-1889; a study on the relationship of external affairs to internal political development;" W.J. Beinart "Production, labour migrancy and the chieftancy: aspects of the political economy of Pondoland, c. 1860-1930;" and P. Delius "The Pedi polity under Sekwati and Sckhukhune 1828-1880."[64]

Despite the success of SOAS and other British institutions in producing interesting debates and high quality scholars, the growth and development of African History slowed down and would soon show signs of regression. Oliver expressed his concerns about such tendencies:

"Furthermore, as I looked round the seminar room, I worried increasingly about how many of the present generation of research students would find jobs. Already in 1977 I had given a talk at University College in which I predicted the impending collapse of the 'African History mushroom' I said that, whereas in 1947 there had been only a single academic practitioner in the subject, thirty years later there were at least one thousand in university posts around the world and probably another thousand aspirants...In England there were at this stage somewhere around ninety posts scattered across about fifty universities. With few exceptions they were occupied by people who had begun their careers teaching in African universities during the 1950s and 1960s, but this line of approach was now closing down, and there was no reason to think that all these places, when they fell vacant, would be regarded as sacrosanct to Africa."[65]

This shows the mixed perceptions of the discipline in the 1970s. On the one hand, there was a pride for the success the field had had in the last twenty years, but on the other, doubts were beginning to emerge about its continuous growth and even its very survival.

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[64] *Ibidem.*

[65] Oliver, R. *Op.cit.* 1997. p.363.

In terms of research, one of SOAS' most significant contributions was, arguably, the work done in the field of South African History. A major figure in this process was Prof. Shula Marks. She promoted the development of new approaches to the study of the South African past in the work of her research students and through the seminars in the Institute of Commonwealth Studies. Some results of this work were presented in the book *Economy and society in pre-industrial South Africa* that was edited by Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore. It attempted to go beyond the issue of "interaction" that had been a core notion in the recent development of South African History.

"The historical experience of all South Africa's peoples needs to be explored not only at their points of 'interaction' but also in terms of the internal dynamic of their various social formations and their articulation with the nineteenth century world economy."[66]

The language in this comment already uncovers the importance that Marxism had in the new approaches developed by the contributors to these text. Some time later a second collection was published in which one can find further elaboration and a significant development from of ideas exposed in the first text. *Industrialisation and Social change in South Africa*[67] was more than a mere continuation of the problems presented in the last book. It presented a serious revision of some of the questions and principles exposed previously. The ideas presented in these texts will be carefully examined later. However, it is important to highlight that both are evidence of the importance that SOAS and the Institute of Commonwealth Studies had in the development of the new historiography. Second, they also show some attempts to further integrate the study of South African History within an African context.

The success of the new South African historiography was certainly a reflection of the achievements of SOAS' historians in their research of the African past. This situation, however, was over-shadowed by the increasing problems the institution was facing, and the economic problems of Africa. SOAS had traditionally received many graduate students from Africa. The adverse economic circumstances in the

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[66] Marks, S. & A. Atmore. "Introduction." Marks, S. & A. Atmore (eds.) *Economy and society in pre-industrial South Africa.* 1980.p.2.

[67] Marks, S. & R. Rathbone (eds.) *Industrialisation and social change in South Africa, 1870-1930: African class formation, culture and consciousness.* 1982.

continent were aggravated by the decision by the British Government to increase the fees for overseas students towards the end of the decade. This was a significant blow to SOAS where overseas students had always been a large proportion of the student population. As economic and social conditions became worse, student numbers also went down. Students in general were also put off by the diminishing chances of getting a job as historians of Africa. Research by historians was also affected by instability in African countries. This resulted in diminished contacts between British and African institutions. Oliver remembers that, in contrast to his previous experience, the end of the decade saw a sharp decline in the number of students and, even more sadly, a growing concern about the possibilities of doing research in Africa.[68]

D) The United States.

The 1970s saw an end to the economic boom that had supported the expansion of higher education in the United States. Regarding the academic depression of these years Novick said:

"There were various causes of the great academic depression which began in the 1970s, but at its heart was a crisis of overproduction. Exhilarated by prospects of seemingly endless expansion, doctoral programs had turned out new would-be college teachers at and even increasing rate, the number of new history PhDs who emerged annually tripled in the course of the decade, peaking over twelve hundred a year in the early seventies. It was simply assumed that there would be jobs for all. By the late sixties the handwriting was on the wall, but it was a few years before academics could bring themselves to read it. The baby boom had ended; by the mid-eighties the college-aged population would be shrinking, the shrinkage would not turn around until the mid-nineties, and the pool of potential undergraduates would not turn to previous levels before the twenty-first century. Caution and contraction were to replace the ebullient expansionism of the sixties."[69]

In addition to these problems Africa specialists also had to contend with the increasing questions about the relevance of the field in the American context. The events in Montreal in 1969 had put in question the credibility of African studies. The challenge focused on two issues. First, the racial identity of those involved in the study of Africa (whites rather than blacks), and thus their philosophical

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[68] Oliver, R. *Op.cit.* 1997. p.363.

[69] Novick, P. *That Noble Dream. The 'Objectivity question' and the American historical profession.* 1988. p.575.

approach (Colonialist/ Imperialist/Euro-centric as opposed to Pan-African/Afro-centric). Second, there was a question over the political militancy of academics who were seen as not taking a clear stance on questions related to the oppression of Africans inside and outside Africa. Thus the challenge against African studies was not based on a critical analysis of the works produced by scholars, but on their perceived political and moral positions. Despite this, the economic and social circumstances that emerged in the 1970s gave great importance to these moral and political considerations.

Scholars interested in Africa faced a sharp decline in the interest shown before by Government and other funding agencies. Programs in African Studies were finding it increasingly difficult to secure external funding. They had to compete not only among themselves, but also against other fields that were seen as more innovative and argued to be "more relevant", such as Gender studies and African-American studies. Funding agencies and Government were the ones to be convinced if research on African studies was to be maintained in American institutions.

The 1970s caught the Program of African Studies at Northwestern in the middle of financial difficulties. Although it was unlikely that its survival was in danger, there was a concern about its potential for expansion and even its capability to maintain standards. So far the Program had depended heavily on Foundation money and government grants. These, however, were getting close to their end, and PAS found itself looking for someone who could continue providing financial support.

The Annual Report for the year 1972-73 stated: "Despite the enthusiasm, the Program of African Studies was confronted in the course of the academic year, 1972-73, with the most serious financial problems of its twenty-five year history."[70] The problems facing it were the result of two tendencies. First, the termination of the Foundation grants that had been crucial to its creation. Second, the budgetary cuts at government level and changes in the policies of allocation of funds. In the case of Northwestern, the situation was aggravated by the University's ambivalent position regarding their economic commitments to PAS.

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[70] "Annual Report for the Program of African Studies, 1972-73." *Program of African Studies Records.* NUA.

By October 1970, the 10 year grant received from the Ford Foundation was coming close to an end. Since the beginning of the year, Gwendolen Carter had been in talks with the University administration to define the position of the University regarding PAS. A meeting was called between Carter and other members of the administration "to clarify the degree and character of the commitments of the University to the Program of African Studies so as to prepare the way for a request to the Ford Foundation for a supplementary grant."[71] In this meeting it was agreed that the Ford Foundation be provided with a revised budget for the period of August 31 1970 to August 31, 1975. This new budget decreased the amount contributed to salaries. This was due to the financial difficulties faced by the University. The University also agreed to maintain Africa House and its staff to a satisfactory level, although not necessarily at the same level it had enjoyed during the period of the grant. Regarding travel, research and fellowships, the budget would make adjustments to limit the funds available for these purposes, unless extra money could be obtained from the Office of Education and other external sources.[72]

In 1971, the PAS was transferred from the jurisdiction of the College of Arts and Sciences to the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs.[73] It is possible that this change once again brought uncertainty about the commitment of the University to PAS. In this context, Carter sought further assurances regarding the situation of the Program. In a letter to Walter S. Owen (Vice-President of Science and Research) dated April 20 1972, she outlined some of the main activities of the Program for which they would need financial support. Salaries for regular members of faculty were assumed to be part of the commitment together with the costs of running Africa House. However, there were other costs that had not been included in the original agreement such as the salaries for language lecturers (that were vital to retain NDEA funding[74]), and provisions for visiting professors from Africa. Carter also argued for money to be secured for recruitment of African graduates and for the support of research in Africa. Carter's demands were significant. She knew she would need some strong commitment from the

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[71] Gwendolen Carter to Dean Payson Wild. May 5, 1972. *Program of African Studies Records.* NUA.

[72] Minute of meeting between the Messrs. Wild, Noble, Hatter, Williams and Miss Carter. October 19, 1970. *Program of African Studies Records.* NUA.

[73] Payson S. Wild to Gwendolen Carter. October 1, 1971. *Program of African Studies Records.* NUA.

[74] The provision of language training was one of the main requirements for the granting of funding through the National Defense Education Act or Title VI, managed by the Office of Education.

University if the Program was to secure an extension grant from the Ford Foundation. She also knew, however, that alternative means of support were becoming more scarce and it is understandable that she wanted some assurances on the future development of the Program. She finished her letter saying:

"Naturally we hope for continued support for the Program from foundations and the United States Office of Education and shall strive to secure such support. Since, however, the continuation of such outside funding is always problematic, I would hope that the university will be prepared to commit its own resources and where necessary to maintain the Program of African Studies at its current standards of effectiveness."[75]

The response from the Vice-President recognised the value of the work done by Carter and her colleagues. However, he said, "I cannot imagine that any administration would commit itself to the financial support of these programs years ahead of the time at which such support is necessary. We will help you and your successors to obtain the necessary support from Federal agencies or private foundations. These platitudinous generalities are not a brush off. Most of the crises which you foresee are not imminent. Those that are will receive our immediate attention."[76]

The ambivalent attitude of the University was to have a serious effect on the development of PAS. Funding opportunities did become scarce as competition grew. In 1975 Carter wrote: "I would like to bring up a problem that concerns me deeply as the chief fund raiser for the Program since I came to Northwestern. Twice recently I have seen substantial funding opportunities for the Program picked up by other universities either because of apparent lack of local follow-up or unwillingness to assume ultimate commitments."[77]

Despite of the financial concerns, the PAS retained a good level of popularity among students. The total enrolment did not grow dramatically, but neither did it fall. In 1972-73 there were approximately 85 undergraduates enrolled in courses concerned with Africa, and seventeen M.A.s were awarded in 1973. Seven of these were in history. The Program also awarded ten PhDs, four in anthropology, two in

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[75] Gwendolen Carter to Walter S. Owen. April 20, 1972. *Program of African Studies Records*. NUA.

[76] Walter S. Owen to Gwendolen Carter. May 8, 1972. *Program of African Studies Records*. NUA.

[77] Gwnedolen Carter to David Mintzer. April 12, 1974. *Program of African Studies Records*. NUA.

linguistics and one each in history, philosophy, religion and political science.[78] At that point the History Department reported approximately thirty PhD candidates enrolled in African History, something that made history the most popular discipline in the Program.[79]

The improvement in the position of history within the Program was reflected in the staffing situation. During the 1960s the teaching of African History had been dependant on visiting scholars until the arrival of John Rowe who was later joined by Ivor Wilks. Throughout the 1970s other historians joined the department: I. Sundiata, Carl Petry and Sterling Stuckey who eventually became chairman of the Afro-American department.

The additions to the staff allowed for more and increasingly diverse courses. Particularly important was the introduction of African Studies courses at the undergraduate level. This was a clear move towards making the field more popular and to broaden its social appeal. Particularly, it was said: "It is anticipated that the new program will have a specific appeal to black undergraduates concerned to explore objectively their own heritage, as well as to a wide cross-section of the undergraduate community increasingly concerned with third world studies...."[80]

Some courses from African-American studies were incorporated in the Program such as Literature in African American History and culture. Other new introductions reflect some of the main changes in the field during this period. For example, more attention was given to South African History. Particularly important in this period were the discussions about history and theory, specifically Marxism. John Rowe remembers this as a very challenging moment for him, since he had to learn the new theories to be able to introduce their students to their use in African History.[81]

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[78] "Annual Report for the Program of African Studies, 1972-73." *Program of African Studies Records.* NUA.

[79] *Ibidem.*

[80] "B25 Africa and interdisciplinary survey. Interim Report." December 10, 1971. *Program of African Studies Records.* NUA.

[81] Interview with J. Rowe. October 14, 1999.

Both Wilks and Rowe were having problems with the new theories. Wilks work, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*[82] was criticised for its dubious use of social science concepts.

"A more substantial criticism can perhaps be made with regard to the use of concepts such as "bureaucracy," "mercantilism," and "modernization." Wilks justifies his use of such concepts as facilitating a comparative perspective, and it is to be hoped that no historian will quarrel with this. The applicability of such concepts to particular cases surely needs, however, to be argued for, and one would have expected more than Wilks offers in the way of discussion of the theoretical issues involved."[83]

Another reviewer of the text had a different interpretation of Wilks' use of social science concepts in his work. Talking about the conclusion of the text Thomas McCaskie stated:

"An odd feature of this final discussion is that, after page 700, the Marxist concepts of class and consciousness are introduced in an abrupt manner. A treatment of these matters, in any direct or serious analytic way, is notably absent from the rest of the book, and their anomalous appearance at the end impresses the reader as an afterthought. Certainly, the highly compressed issues in the Asante context is very unsatisfactory. It is poorly theorized and is certainly more marxisant than Marxist."[84]

Despite the many contributions that Wilks' work made to the history of Asante, it is clear that it was a poor attempt to apply Marxism to African History. In itself, the attempt shows how the use of theoretical approaches became important in these years, and how it was a real challenge for many historians. The problem, however, went beyond the generational gap or the differences in training. The difficulty in applying particular theoretical approaches to the study of African History was derived mostly from the lack of careful reflection upon the quality and quantity of empirical material. If it is true to say that theory largely determines evidence, it is also naïve to assume that theory can be mechanically applied to any data. Wilks' work is but one example of how Marxism was simplistically applied to African History, but his was certainly not the only case.

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[82] Wilks, I. *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: the structure and evolution of a political order.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1975.

[83] Law, R.C.C. "Asante in the Nineteenth Century." *JAH.* 8, (1), 1976. p.138.

[84] McCaskie, T. "Empire State: Asante and the historians." *JAH.* 33,(3) p. 471.

The University of Wisconsin- Madison was also hit by the budgetary cuts that had affected Northwestern. However, African Studies in general and African History in particular did not seem to have been under the same amount of pressure as had been the case for Northwestern. There were two reasons for this. First, since its creation, the African Studies Program had enjoyed significant support from the University. Second, given the way in which the program was created the work done by members of the African Studies Program was well integrated into the respective departments. This was particularly true in History, where the African component had achieved considerable importance.

However, problems did occur. Despite its strengths, the History Department was not immune to the problems that were affecting the whole of the discipline. A decline in student numbers resulted in a decreased budget. The department, however, managed to maintain good levels of staffing.[85]

In a draft for a grant proposal, Curtin reflected on the crisis and some possible solutions:

"Falling history enrolments and student complaints about lack of relevance are a well known national phenomenon of recent years. We see no value in redesigning history courses merely for the sake of popularity with students, but we do see value in reconsidering the usual history offering and supplement it with groups of courses designed to meet the test of relevance by taking a thematic and comparative approach to the past of human societies."[86]

In these lines Curtin did not only reflect on the general sense of crisis around history and other humanities in terms of falling student numbers. He also identifies "lack of relevance" as the cause of this crisis. This goes to show how the issue of "relevance" had become problematic for the discipline of history in general. In the end, his proposal was simply to widen the scope of the Program of Comparative Tropical History. This eventually became the Program in Comparative World History by incorporating the study of Western civilisations among the potential areas of specialisation.[87]

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[85] E. David Cronon (Dean) to I Kutler. February 24, 1976. *E. David Cronon. Correspondence.* UWMA.

[86] Curtin, D. Phillip. Institutional development grant proposal to the National Endowment for Humanities. Draft from the University of Wisconsin Program in Comparative World History. May 28, 1973. *Phillip D. Curtin General Files.* UWMA.

[87] Program of Comparative World History. "Annual Report for 1972-73." *Philip D. Curtin General Files.* UWMA.

Despite these changes and his convincing arguments, Curtin's attempts to obtain extra funding were unsuccessful. The priorities had changed,[88] and in a climate of reduced resources everything was about priorities. Unfortunately for the Program of Comparative World History, its financial restrictions were not the most serious concern. In 1975 Curtin received an offer from John Hopkins University and decided to leave Wisconsin. There is no evidence to make us think that Curtin was particularly unhappy with his professional situation in Wisconsin. Despite the initial problems with other members of the department he had become a very valued colleague. His decision to go followed personal reasons. It was a loss the department deeply regretted.[89]

The study of African History in Wisconsin, however, did not only depend on the Program of Comparative World History. It was also related to the African Studies Program and the African History Program. These two also suffered from funding problems. Both programs managed to remain relatively strong, but they had to adapt to new challenges in order to remain competitive.

In 1972 the director of the Program, Mr. David Wiley, informed the African Studies Committee of some changes in the NDEA funding. At that point there were 101 Language and Area centres, but the expectation was that there would only be 40-45 for 1972-73. This was considered to be a "crucial period" in the funding of the program. The Office of Education had established new priorities and more emphasis was to be given to interdisciplinary research (understood as problem-oriented research), and to the relationship between language problems and area studies.[90] The next year (1973-74), the ASP was one of only four programs to be designated a NDEA Language and Area Center by the Office of Education.[91]

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[88] Janet Berls (National Endowment for the Humanities) to Philip D. Curtin. September 28, 1973. *Philip D. Curtin General Files.* UWMA.

[89] Two years earlier in a letter from Allan G. Bogue, Chairman of the History Department to the Chancellor, Curtin had been proposed as the next Vilas Professor, a very well regarded title. In this letter the Chairman said: "I don't believe that our Third World offerings are matched in breadth and quality by those in any other American university, and everyone in the department agrees that Philip Curtin is more responsible for this than anyone else." Allan G. Bogue to H. Edwin Young. March 8, 1973. *H. Edwin Young Correspondence.* UWMA.

[90] Minute September 12, 1972. African Studies Program Committee Minutes. *African Studies Program Records.* UWM.

[91] The other three were UCLA, Northwestern and Indiana. Minute October 2, 1973. African Studies Program Committee Minutes. *African Studies Program Records.* UWM.

As the decade progressed, demands by funding agencies became more varied and specific. In 1976, for example Mr. D. Wiley informed the committee that: "This year a new regulation requires an explicit 15% of budget to be spent on outreach activities."[92] While more requirements emerged, the fortunes of some of the large programs started to turn. In 1976 Wiley wrote:

"Our program was 'ranked very highly by the panellists of the OE administrators,' in a tie for number one ranking among Africa area centers in the nation with Indiana University's program. They also added that there was a large gap in quality between these two programs and the other African centers, several of which have slipped badly in quality -especially UCLA, Northwestern University, and University of Illinois. The other African centers, I understand, are Stanford University, Michigan State, and University of Florida. It is interesting that some of the earlier well-known centers at Columbia, Boston University and Syracuse are not even in the top eight in terms of overall program quality."[93]

This shows that Programs were facing difficult demands from the funding agencies. Wisconsin was able to introduce some innovation in their approach to African History. One important step was the introduction of the Program in African Economic History, which was again an initiative of Curtin and Marvin Miracle.[94] Another important innovation was the incorporation of staff members from the African-American Studies department that had been recently created. During the 1970s, Richard Ralston and Tom Schick joined the staff of the ASP as members of the African-American Studies department.[95] Many of these changes reveal the attempt by the ASP to please the funding bodies by encouraging research and outreach work that was more visibly relevant to a wider population. Towards the end of the decade, the program registered a shift from the initial domination of historical studies to "the professional and language and linguistic skills."[96]

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[92] "African Studies Program Announcements." Frebruary 3, 1976. *African Studies Program Records.* UWM.

[93] Memorandum from David Wiley to Dean Cronon, Dean Johnson, Dean Mulvihill and members of the African Studies Program Planning Committee. June 4, 1976. African Studies Program Committee Minutes. *African Studies Program Records.* UWM.

[94] "Performance Report for the year 1974-1975." Title VI Documents. *African Studies Program Records.* UWM.

[95] "Performance Report for the years 1974-75 and 1975-76." Title VI Documents. *African Studies Program Records.* UWM.

[96] "A Proposal to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. U.S. Office of Education. Language and Area Center Section. For Application for NDEA Title VI Support for the University of Wisconsin-Madison African Language and Area Center. 1981-1982." Title VI Document. *African Studies Program Records.* UWM.

Despite the difficulties and changes, the number of historians of Africa attached to the ASP increased. Curtin's departure coincided with the return of Vansina. He was joined by Steve Feierman, William Brown, Byron D. Cannon (Middle East and North Africa) Joseph Corry (East Africa), Robert L. Koehl (Education in Africa), and Norman L. Cigar (North Africa, Morocco).

After Vansina's resignation in 1973, the department had hired a young and promising historian of Islam, William Brown. Now after Curtin's resignation it was possible for the department to re-employ Vansina, after his disappointing experience in Europe.[97] Most of the running of the Program of African History was in hands of these three members of staff. In Vansina's words "The major intellectual innovation in the program following 1975 was the growing importance given to the formal teaching of social science theory."[98] Feierman was a strong supporter of this new course. He wanted to introduce young students to the classics of social theory thought, since he sensed this was becoming a major trend in the study of history in general.[99]

In 1976 the American Caucus of the History Department was considering the introduction of a "social science" track. As a result of this, the Chairman of the department, Peter H. Smith wrote to Feierman to ask him "to explore, with other colleagues, the potential for a new graduate-level course on 'History and Theory'".[100] Discussions in the department about the creation of this new course went on during 1977. The main point of contention was the status of the course. The first proposal was that "every graduate student entering in September 1977 or thereafter would be required to take a history and theory course during his or her graduate career."[101] There was an attempt later that year to change this proposal and to make it optional for each caucus to make the course History and Theory compulsory. This was heavily supported by the European History Caucus.[102] There were concerns among some members that the imposition of this course on all students would interfere with the programs already in place, and would become an additional burden in an already overloaded program. Despite

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[97] Vansina, J. *Living with Africa*.1994. p.171-72.

[98] *Ibidem*.p.184.

[99] Interview with S. Feierman. November 13, 1999.

[100] Peter H. Smith to S. Feierman. December 21, 1976. *Department Files*. UWMA.

[101] Minute May 6, 1977. *Departmental Meeting Minutes*. UWMA.

[102] Minute December 2, 1977. *Departmental Meeting Minutes*. UWMA.

the discussions, the department finally proposed the creation of such a course in April 1978.[103] These discussions illustrate that not all historians were convinced of the benefits of introducing social-science theory to all graduate students. What is important to notice, however, is that it was mainly among historians of the Third World Caucus that this idea became more popular. Historians of the United States and Europe did not oppose the course in itself, but were not convinced that it was absolutely necessary.

Feierman's role in this debate is hardly surprising. He had always been able to use social science theory in his historical work and he was probably aware of the transformations sweeping through the field in the mid-1970s. Even Vansina who had been always able to incorporate his anthropological knowledge to history was somehow forced to rethink his position in this matter. As he said in his autobiography he "stood betwixt and between theory and practice."[104]

In addition to this new emphasis on theory, there was another trend that is worth mentioning. Wisconsin had traditionally been a centre of great importance in the study of pre-colonial history. As the 1970s progressed, Vansina remained convinced that historians should concentrate on this area. However, Feierman realised that many things were happening in the study of more recent periods of history. He thought it would be unfortunate if Wisconsin students were not exposed to such new ideas. Thus, he moved his research towards the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to complement their history program.[105] This trend was quite characteristic of the 1970s, when research into the pre-colonial past started to decrease. This was the result of a number of causes. This kind of research demanded excellent language skills and extended periods of fieldwork. Given the increasing cuts in the funding of programs, it became more difficult to achieve these conditions. In addition, the unstable political and economic circumstances in Africa were also a serious deterrent. All these added to the increased interest in the study of colonialism and underdevelopment contributed to the gradual neglect of the study of the pre-colonial period.

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[103] Peter H. Smith to James Bower (Faculty Division of Social Science). April 25, 1978. *Departmental Meeting Minutes*. UWMA.

[104] Vansina, J. *Op.cit.* 1994. p.184.

[105] Interview with S. Feierman. November 13, 1999.

Despite the efforts to adapt to the needs and concerns of potential students, the number of students who enrolled to do graduate work on African History decreased. This was undoubtedly a consequence of the cuts in the financial support provided to students and of the increasing difficulties in securing a job. On the other hand, undergraduate enrolments increased. This again switched the emphasis from graduate training to undergraduate teaching.[106]

Taking account of all of this it is difficult to disagree with Ranger's diagnosis about a crisis in African studies. However, it is important to understand the different levels at which this crisis was operating. First, there was the general crisis of institutions. In times of economic distress universities were required to tighten their priorities. It was in these circumstances that the study of Africa really had to prove itself to survive. This was obviously more difficult in non-African universities, where the study of Africa could not be seen as a priority. These universities, however, were better equipped to weather the storm. In the end, this crisis had its worse effects in African institutions.

This particular crisis in African History should be understood in the context of several interrelated processes. First, the increasing belief that the discipline of history itself was irrelevant, not just African History. This judgement came from an increasing belief that education should provide practical skills that will allow the individual to perform in society. One can perceive the importance of this trend on the demands made from funding bodies for a more "problem-oriented" education. One can also see this trend in the increasing emphasis put on undergraduate teaching rather than on graduate training. Therefore, History was seen as something that had to directly contribute to the solution of social, economic and political problems, rather than as an exercise of reflection and intellectual criticism. Second, the decrease in the amount of money available to institutions. Although this trend had an effect on most fields of history, it affected African History to a greater degree. This happened for two reasons. First, because the natural environments for developing research in the African past, the African universities, were faced with an economic crisis that put history way down the list of priorities. Second, because the research on African History in American and British universities did not have African History as an academic priority, and the

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[106] *Ibidem.* p.185.

decrease in the amount of funding available made it necessary to prioritise more than had been necessary a decade ago, when money was abundant and expansion was the order of the day. It is at the level of institutions that we can see the discourse of relevance becoming more important. Scholars of Africa felt they could no longer compete on the institutional environment unless they could prove that the study of Africa could be relevant, even when this notion of relevance was very problematic and unclear.

Part 2.- African historiography and the crisis of knowledge.

The institutional crisis that was described in the last section was certainly related to developments within the field of African History. The perception that African History in particular, and history in general, were becoming less relevant was more than a mere excuse to justify funding cuts. It was a reality perceived by historians themselves.

> "History's epistemological crisis was played out against a background of depression which was both material and moral. For members of all academic disciplines, and for historians more than most, the lush years of the sixties were followed by years of famine which seemed likely to last out the century. At the same time there was a widespread sense that the historical profession was becoming apart at the seams: that it had become in William Bouwsma's words, 'little more than a congeries of groups, some quite small... which can speak only imperfectly to each other.'"[107]

The institutional crisis in African History was intimately linked with a wider epistemological crisis that affected most of the social sciences and humanities and history in particular. This was reflected in the emergence of notions such as "peoples' history" that aimed at portraying historical research as a discipline that could empower social groups. Areas of social history such as women's history and the history of other minority groups were founded on the principle that they could bring about social and political benefit to these communities.

This epistemological crisis hit African History at a time when changes in Africa seriously put in question the relevance of history to solve the problems of the continent. Social and political crises were mushrooming and historians of the previous decade found their past optimism out of place. There was a growing

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[107] Novick, P. *That Noble dream.*1988.p.573.

awareness that the "usable past" attempted by the likes of Terence Ranger had overlooked crucial questions and the time had arrived to address these issues.

Despite the impact of these concerns in African History one should not overlook the wider picture. This is crucial to understand the position of African History with regards to the rest of the discipline. To do this, one has to start by looking at the epistemological revolution that had occurred since the 1960s. If one had to select one text that symbolises the emergence of such a revolution, one has to look at Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* published in 1962. This text was both a catalyst and the result of a wide process of analysis on the ways in which scientific knowledge is produced. More importantly, this text initiated a debate on the production and the nature of knowledge in general, and by doing this it unleashed what Novick called a "second crisis of historicism."[108]

"From the 1960s onward the objectivist assumptions and foundations of many academic disciplines came to be undermined by currents of thought emanating from culturally very "straight" scholars. In one field after another distinctions between fact and value and between theory and observation were called into question. For many, postures of disinterestedness and neutrality increasingly appeared outmoded and illusory. It ceased to be axiomatic that the scholar's or scientist's task was to represent accurately what was "out there". Most crucially, and across the board, the notion of a determinate and unitary truth about the physical and social world, approachable if not ultimately reachable, came to be seen by a growing number of scholars as a chimera. And with skepticism about that telos, the meaning of "progress" in science and scholarship became problematic. The objectivity question, in one form or another, moved to the top of disciplinary agendas."[109]

It is not a coincidence that it is at this juncture that theoretical approaches became more popular among historians. This was a time when the epistemological value given to empirical observation was seriously questioned. After all, if all data was already theoretically charged, the only option was to improve the available theoretical tools. As Novick wrote: "In the main, young radical historians were firmly committed to realist, objectivist, and antirelativist tradition of the left...Leftist historians were convinced that what they were offering was not just objectively true, but that it was the truth."[110]

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[108] *Ibidem.*p.523.

[109] *Ibidem.*

[110] *Ibidem.* p.423.

Not all areas were equally affected. In my view, African History was particularly vulnerable, given the limited amount of empirical material and the fact that so little of what was available had been carefully analysed. At the same time, it is not surprising that the more popular theoretical approaches were those that offered an understanding of imperialism, poverty and dispossession. Both Marxism and Underdevelopment dealt with these issues. This gave these methodologies a social and, in some cases, moral advantage over other approaches to the African past.

Underdevelopment theory had been popular among Latin American intellectuals since the 1920s and 1930s, and had remained a dynamic debate that had been able to incorporate new ideas and concepts.[111] However, the more sophisticated of these debates did not reach the majority of academics outside Latin America. It was mainly the work of André Gunder Frank who took these discussions to a wider audience.

"Andre Gunder Frank drew the most international and heated attention -perhaps because he published originally in English (he soon secured Spanish, Portuguese, French and Italian translations), or because his analysis was crudely one-dimensional and unchanging compared to that of Cardoso or Faletto, or because he was Anglo rather than Latin American."[112]

In African History, the most influential work in which development theory was used was *How Europe underdeveloped Africa* by Walter Rodney. The influence of Gunder Frank in this book is evident. It proposed a new framework for the study of African History, by putting greater emphasis in the study of Africa in the context of world economic and social relations. In the same vein as Gunder Frank, it proposed the understanding of a world-system mainly divided between the periphery and the core. This system worked in a way that those areas of the core were able to extract capital from those in the periphery, thus causing the underdevelopment of the latter.

Rodney's text was far from being an in-depth analysis of African History. Rather it was a brilliantly presented interpretative view exposed in relatively simple terms. This was probably part of its appeal. However, more important for its success was

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[111] Stern, S. S. "Feudalism, Capitalism and the World-System in the perspective of Latin America and the Caribbean." *Confronting historical paradigms*. 1993. pp.23-83.

[112] *Ibidem*. p.28.

the relevance it seemed to have to the difficult situation in Africa. Given the emphasis on the role of world-powers and in the imbalance of the world's economy, the book could be seen as a challenge to the notion of African initiative. Rodney himself argued that the question was not about African agency but about the limitations of that agency within the colonial or neo-colonial context. Following this idea, the book was described by one reviewer as suggesting a new enterprise: "the reinterpretation of African social history."[113]

"If the nationalism of the new classes does not essentially challenge the process of peripheral underdevelopment, then perhaps the colonial and pre-colonial activities of the masses should be re-examined not, following Ranger, in terms of their contributions to 'nationalism,' but as a premature and so far abortive struggles against the inequalities of world capitalist development."[114]

Legassick's interpretation of Rodney is certainly right in his criticism of the anachronistic analysis of Nationalist history. However, he replaces it with an equally inadequate question. Can the activities of common people be interpreted as a struggle against capitalism? This question reveals some of the problems with underdevelopment theory. How can we interpret the lives and actions of individuals and groups in relation to processes and concepts that have little or no meaning to them? Can this kind of approach help us understand the variety and complexity of human experience? It seems clear that, as an approach to social history, Underdevelopment theory contributed more questions than answers.

Marxism introduced new historical forces, new concepts and new questions to the study of the African past. Unfortunately, Marxist theory has never been a fully coherent system of interpretation The body of literature that one can identify as Marxist is not totally consistent on the definition of core concepts, and sometimes not even on the centrality of some processes. In the words of Robin Law: "Marxists may be agreed on the superiority of the Marxist method to 'bourgeoisie' thought, but there seems to be little agreement among them about the precise nature of this Marxist method."[115]

The theoretical discussions among historians who could not agree about how to define "mode of production" or "class" particularly among pre-colonial African

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[113] Legassick, M. "Perspectives on African 'underdevelopment'" *JAH.* 17, (3), 1976. p.440

[114] *Ibidem.*

[115] Law, R. "In search of a Marxist perspective on pre-colonial tropical Africa." *JAH.* 19, (3), 1978. p.445.

societies was more than a mere process of creative theoretical clarification. It revealed a significant problem in the application of Marxism to the study of Africa's precolonial past. Marx's writings and the literature that followed it mainly focused on the development of capitalism. This body of literature had little concern with pre-industrial societies and what was written about these was often unreliable and simplistic. How could this conceptual construction be used to understand societies that were not only pre-industrial but also pre-literate? The theoretical debates were, more often than not, a way of avoiding this question. In the end, it was easier to dwell on what Marx said or did not say than to search for the evidence that could support the existence of modes of production and classes in Africa. It is not surprising that the main historical synthesis that emerged from the Marxist tradition *The Making of contemporary Africa* by Bill Freund, dealt mainly with the period since 1800 and devoted little space to the precolonial past. On the issue of class he said:

"Classes are not unique to capitalism and forms of domination can precede or succeed true social classes. In the African continent there are a great range of historically specific social and economic relationships that, with some imagination and flexibility, can be discussed in class terms. One should not apply too mechanically the well-known terminology of domination and appropriation that comes from the study of other parts of the world. Yet class certainly cannot be left out of African History."[116]

The question is not if class can or cannot be part of African History, the question is of which African History. Class is a problematic concept in the precolonial period, and its use requires more than "some imagination and flexibility." It requires more evidence and a better understanding of precolonial societies, something that was not, and in some cases is still not, available.

The problems and contradictions of applying Marxist theory to African History become more evident when we look at the case of South Africa. While historians of other parts of Africa were "banging their heads" with notions like class and mode of production, historians of South Africa were truly uncovering new layers of understanding of South African History. The success of the "radical" perspective in South African History seemed to set this historiography, once again, at odds with that of rest of Africa. Unlike the rest of the continent and

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[116] Freund, B. *The making of contemporary Africa.* 1984. p.XII.

other areas, historical research in South was thriving. This was due to three reasons. First, the institutional situation of South African universities. This could not be more different from what was occurring in other African countries. The economic situation in South Africa was relatively affluent and this helped to support a larger number of historians and research.[117] This was seen in the case of Cape Town where we saw a relative enlargement of the History Department, both in members of staff and student numbers. A second element that contributed to its initial success (when compared with the United States and Britain) was the social and intellectual environment of the country.

"South Africanists were operating in a very different political context. The years of resurgent conservatism in the United States and Britain saw popular mobilization and mass resistance in South Africa, with significant inroads made upon ruling-class unity and hegemony. While the metropolitan intellectual left experiences isolation and anxiety, radical scholars in South Africa sensed a support and purpose for their work."[118]

A third element, which was in a great extent a result of the last two, was the dynamism of the field itself, both socially and intellectually. The first groups of historians who initiated it were able to move back into South Africa and rapidly moved beyond the sole concerns imposed by early Marxist analysis. It is also important to remember that South Africa already had a significant amount of historical debate not only between radical and liberal historians but also between English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking historians.

The development of the "radical" tradition in South African History can roughly be divided in two phases that occurred almost simultaneously. First, most of the work was carried out by South African scholars working outside South Africa, mainly the UK, particularly in connection with SOAS and the Institute of

[117] Saunders, C.C. "The history of African History." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*. 5, (1/2), 1986. pp.188-89.

[118] Bundy, C. "An image of its own past? Towards a comparison of American and South African historiography." *Radical History Review*. 46/47, 1990. pp. 134-35. Although it is true that Marxism had a relatively colder reception among American and British historians one should not underestimate the impact it had among people like Bill Freund, Frederick Cooper and John Lonsdale whose work was significantly influenced by Marxist approaches.

Commonwealth Studies.[119] At the centre of this were Shula Marks, Antony Atmore, and a wider network of scholars such as the Canadian F.A. Johnston, the émigré Stanley Trapido, and the exiled Martin Legassick, whose influential piece on the frontier became a landmark for the new historiography.[120] The approach encouraged by these scholars was both a break with and an extension of work done on African History in the previous decade. In 1970, Marks published a sharp critique of the recently published *Oxford History of South Africa* where she identified some of the problems with the notion of interaction, which had been the main interpretative element in the survey. On interaction she said: "...it does leave out those large areas of historical experience of the black man as well as of the white which were concerned with purely internal and independent political developments. While interdependence is stressed, independence and conflict, that undeniable ingredient of South African History, are underplayed and relatively unexplored."[121]

This interest for the internal dynamics of societies became the centre of discussions for a group of scholars whose works were best represented in the text *Economy and society in pre-industrial South Africa* edited by Marks and Atmore. In the introduction to this collection of essays the editors said:

"Its object is to explore, through a series of case studies, three crucial areas in South Africa's nineteenth-century history: the nature of pre-capitalist social formations; the ways in which these were affected, if not necessarily yet restructured, by colonial penetration and mercantile capital; and the impact on Africans of the colonial experience and methods of social control."[122]

The wide range of problems explored in these essays goes beyond the mere exploration of South Africa's social and political development in its relation to capitalism. The reason for this may be found in the fact that, although a materialist approach had certainly informed much of this work, it had also been

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[119] Bozzoli, B. & P. Delius. "Radical history and Southern African society." *Radical History Review*. 46/47, 1990. p.25. Marks, S. "The historiography of South Africa; recent developments." Jewsiewicki, B. & D. Newbury (eds.) *African historiographies: what history for which Africa?* 1986. p.165.

[120] Legassick, M.J. "The frontier tradition in South African History". Marks, S. & A. Atmore (eds.) *Economy and society in pre-industrial South Africa.* 1980. pp.44-79.

[121] Marks, S. "African and Afrikaner history." *JAH.* 11, (3), 1970. p.440.

[122] Marks, S. & A. Atmore. "Introduction." *Economy and society in pre-industrial South Africa.* 1980.pp 2-3.

influenced by a much wider set of ideas. This eclecticism was recognised by the editors themselves:

"As will be evident in the pages that follow, participants were influenced by the *Annales* school and the ecological debate; by the rethinking of African History and work on development and underdevelopment; by recent writing on social history of industrialising Britain and on slavery in the United States; and most recently by the literature sparked off by the French Marxist anthropologists on pre-capitalist modes of production.
Despite the overall concern with the material base of society, by no means all our contributers [sic] subscribe to a materialist or Marxist approach. Nor would they describe these essays as simply 'economic history'. Indeed we positively abjure the implied distinction. They are all, in some sense, an attempt to come to grips with what the *Annales* school have felicitously phrased 'total history.'"[123]

This agenda reflects the ability of South African History to use the materialist approach as a platform for the incorporation of wider concerns, since it gave it a flexibility and dynamism that was difficult to find in other materialist analyses of the time. This capacity would be the secret for success of South African historiography.

The emergence of this work and its success in producing a new interpretation of the South African past was but a prelude to what was about to happen in South Africa itself. A second phase of the development of South African historiography saw the emergence and consolidation of a "radical" scholarship inside South Africa. This process was informed by a number of elements. First, it was influenced by previous trends of radical thought within South Africa such as the South African Communist Party and the intellectuals of the Non-European Unity movement.[124] The first was particularly important for the introduction of the characterisation of South Africa as a "colonialism of a special type." This idea put forward the notion that "South Africa is an example of 'internal colonialism', combining the characteristics of both an imperialist state and a colony within a single indivisible, geographical, political and economic entity."[125]

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[123] *Ibidem.*p.3.

[124] This was a trend of thought that went back to the 1940s. It was largely identified with the "coloured communities of the Cape, although it also involved some white intellectuals. It was a fertile ground for South African Trostskysim. It denied the importance of race and showed much contempt for Liberalism, Nationalism and generally academic historical studies. Bozzoli, B. & P. Delius. *Op.cit.* 1990. p.15.

[125] *Ibidem.* pp.14-15.

The late 1960s also saw the emergence of an indigenous left in South Africa, both among black and white intellectuals and activists. However, the emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement put emphasis on black leadership and excluded the participation of whites. This posed a significant challenge to white liberal intellectuals who became more concerned with finding a new radical identity. It was in this climate that the development of the New Left in England and the United States started to be more influential in South Africa. It provided intellectuals with the concept of class, which allowed them to go beyond issues of race. This influence first arrived through the circulation of papers presented in Oxford, Sussex and London, and later with the return of a number of scholars to South African universities.[126]

The new scholarship that emerged in South Africa retained much of the eclecticism and flexibility of the work that had been done in England. Describing this work Bozzoli and Delius said: "Epistemologically, the school adopted what might be called a 'realist' stance, which distinguished it from the empiricism of earlier times. Empirical evidence was highly respected, but was engaged with theoretical and conceptual categories, often in a dialectical manner. Theory building took place through the construction of new categories, from combinations and adaptations of existing ones, or through the extension of the logic of the existing frameworks into the specifically South (or southern) African cases."[127]

The first and highly influential result of this "indigenous" scholarship was the work of Charles van Onselen on the social history of the Rand region.[128] In this work Van Onselen took further the work done by revisionists outside South Africa. He was clearly influenced by the New Left and Social History that had emerged in England and the United States. However, his work contributed a crucial element that had been relatively neglected so far, the Rand and its particular history of industrialisation.

"*New Babylon, New Nineveh* constitutes an extended and thematically linked exercise in historical materialism which seeks to set the experience of selected groups of ordinary people in Johannesburg within the wider context of the

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[126] *Ibidem.* p.22.

[127] *Ibidem.* p.21.

[128] Van Onselen, C. *Studies in the social and economic history of the Witswatersrand 1886-1914.*1982.

industrial revolution that engulfed the Witswatersrand in the turn of the century. By situating these groups within the emerging structures of the society and refracting their experiences through the process of class struggle, it seeks to demonstrate how, during these formative decades, the ruling classes came to assert control over the subordinate classes of the Rand...."[129]

Van Onselen's work had a tremendous impact both inside and outside South Africa. It showed that the materialist approach could produce a social history that was both theoretically sound and creative within the boundaries of empirical evidence. It brought the materialist analysis to one of the most crucial and influential periods in South African History, the twentieth century industrialisation. Moreover, this work showed how the problems of applying a Marxist perspective to a society that had gone through an industrial revolution and that had copious sources for research were much less obvious.

Van Onselen's work marked the start of a wider project of historical revision. This new trend of scholarship saw history as an active agent in the struggle against apartheid's oppression. Thus, it looked at establishing closer links between scholars, activists and the community at large. This was clearly reflected in the most evident result of the development of the new scholarship the Witswatersrand History Workshop. The latter was formed in 1977 and it held its first conference a year later. The main characteristic of this movement was "its commitment to recovering popular experience and the history of the 'ordinary' men and women, its concern to make these findings communicable and accessible to a wider audience and its interdisciplinary composition."[130]

Within this context the Wits History Workshop was informed by a number of intellectual influences. Among the most important were its contacts with trade union activists, the radical historiography that had been developed so far - particularly through the *History Workshop Journal*-, and a preoccupation with issues of social history such as culture, experience and consciousness.[131]

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[129] *Ibidem.* Vol. 1, p.xvi.

[130] Bonner, P. "The University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop, a retrospect." 1997. p.1.

[131] *Ibidem.* p.2.

In the introduction to the collection of papers that resulted from the second Workshop, Bozzoli reflected on the difficulties of establishing a new interpretation of the South African past and the achievements of the Workshop in this context:

"...pervading many parts of our culture is a deep distrust of, and disdain for, depictions of the past. Perhaps the overt manipulation of history-writing and teaching by our rulers has bred this sense of disdain; even liberal historiography, although less overt in its intentions, implies a 'ruling class' perspective, with its tendency to focus on rulers, governments, power, policy and politics."[132]

The transformation of history writing also needed to address the issue of relevance. The Wits History Workshop approached the study of South African History in a way that tried to both reformulate the epistemological principles of history writing, but also to relate this to the lives of common people and thus challenge the conventional understanding of the past and the present. The phrase that characterised the project in the collection that emerged from the first workshop was "decolonising history".[133] This concern was aimed at producing alternative histories that could contest the received wisdom about the past.

"Such history challenges by its content -for it focuses on the lives of ordinary people, rather than on 'great men and women', or abstracted structures and concepts. It also challenges by its methodology -for it makes use of oral and other sources not normally developed by conventional historians. And finally it challenges by drawing from and engaging with other disciplines in a creative way -'alternative' history benefits by rejecting the confinement of disciplinary boundaries."[134]

A thorough analysis of the development of the History Workshop would demand a separate study of its own. But it is important to reflect on how and why the History Workshop approached the issues of relevance and peoples history. First of all, the history workshop put forward a notion of peoples history strongly founded on local research and deeply concerned with intimate aspects of human experience. For them class and consciousness were more than concepts that had a function in a particular structure, these were reflections on the experience of real people. Historians of South Africa were able to approach these issues only because they had the necessary sources. Historians of other areas of Africa generally

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[132] Bozzoli, B. "Introduction." Bozzoli, B. (ed.) *Town and countryside in the Transvaal. Capitalist penetration and popular response.* 1983. pp.1-2.

[133] Bozzoli, B. "Popular history and the Witswatersrand." Bozzoli, B. (comp.) *Labour, Townships and Protest.* Johannesburgh, 1979.

[134] Bozzoli, B. *Op.cit.* 1983. p. 4.

lacked the amount and quality of material that historians in South Africa had. It is unlikely that a rich and sophisticated historical tradition like the one represented by the Wits History Workshop could have emerged in other areas of historical research in Africa. The argument for a relevant history, although important in the context of the History Workshop, was not made at the expense of documented historical research. In the view of members of the Workshop, their work was not relevant just because of its political and moral standpoint. They knew that it needed to be, first and foremost, academically accepted if it was to have a serious impact.

Despite the success of South African historians in their use of the materialist perspective, the final balance of the radical approach is not clear. At one level, Marxism and Underdevelopment were praised for having transformed the field: "The Marxist approach is accountable for the perception that cultural and social phenomena should be related to material life. The radical approach pushed scholars to recognize that race and ethnicity are not simply a prejudice. They are both ideology and social identity emerging (and manipulated) as social and cultural components of the process of primitive accumulation and industrialisation."[135] However, this approach was seen as a failure because it had been unable to produce a "usable past."

"The evolutionist perspective on time and its linear conception remains the single most important structural obstacle to the production of powerful myths that are useful in the production of national and class-consciousness."[136]

It is significant to notice the standards by which the failure or success of the Marxist approach was being measured. First of all, Jewsiewicki concluded that Marxist historiography had been a failure because it had been unable to produce a history that could transform the social and political realities that affected the lives of African peoples. Once again, this meant to judge African historiography for its social and political impact rather than for its intellectual value. Secondly, when it came to explain why is it that African History had been unable to produce such kind of history, He blamed it on the fact that historians were still working within an evolutionist perspective that was basically Eurocentric and non-African.

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[135] Jewsiewicki, B. "African historical studies: academic knowledge as 'usable past' and radical scholarship." *African Studies Review*. 32, (3), 1989. p.34.

[136] *Ibidem*. pp.4-5.

What Jewsiewicki failed to recognise is that the problems of African History were not merely a matter of choosing a method or of creating a new way of understanding history. Historians of Africa still had to become more familiar and explore even further the possibilities and limitations of the sources that were available to them. In other words, historians of Africa needed more than good intentions, they needed sources and a better understanding of those sources. No theory, however sophisticated or "relevant," could fill that gap.

So far I have concentrated on the development and impact of radical perspectives in African History. These, however, were not the only approaches available at the time. The emergence of Marxism was one manifestation of an active period in social thinking. The social sciences were also influenced by Structuralism.

Structuralism, like Marxism, is a complex and diverse approach to the study of society. It is often related to the figure of the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss in his works *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* and *The Savage Mind.* These are but some examples of a wider body of literature that had a long and lasting impact in the study of African History. The influence of Structuralism during the 1970s, however, was somehow limited to the study of oral traditions. In the next chapter we will see how this early impact became much wider in the following decades.

Structuralist analysis of oral traditions denied the possibility of using them as documents of history, as had been sustained by Vansina. In their view, traditions were only myths that were to be analysed in terms of their logical structure, a structure that reflected the cosmology and beliefs of peoples, rather than their past.

"The structuralist's convincing demonstrations of these homologies, particularly prominent in traditions of origin that purported the account for the beginnings of society or culture. Make awkward the historians' assertions that magical hunters emerging from primeval forests to found great kingdoms could in fact amount to much more than ahistorical fabrications of recent myth-makers."[137]
Historians themselves were becoming well aware of the difficulties of taking oral narratives at their face value. Attempts were made to incorporate oral traditions

[137] Miller, J.C. "Introduction: Listening for the African past." Miller, J.C. (ed.) *The African Past Speaks. Essays on oral tradition and history.* 1980. p.3.

into wider social and cosmological contexts as a way of understanding their historical content. Examples of these were the works of Steven Feierman *The Shambaa Kingdom* (1974), and Joseph Miller's *Kings and Kinsmen* (1976). The attack of Structuralism stimulated this process. By the end of the decade, historians' attitude towards oral traditions had become more complex.

The result of these debates was clearly stated in a collection of essays published in 1980 under the title *The African Past Speaks* and edited by Joseph Miller. Here, historians retained the view that "the historian must approach oral tradition as 'evidence', whatever scholars in other disciplines may choose to do with the same narratives."[138] The analysis of this evidence however, required to take into account more that the content of the tradition itself. As Miller concluded:

"The style of presentation in no way changes the fact that evidence, something surviving from the past, may occur in even the most highly structured narratives. 'History' does not stand in opposition to 'myth', nor even 'histories' to 'myths'. The historian must not only concede but also embrace as vitally important the structure of the tales heard in oral societies in order to identify the ways in which evidence from the past survives there without writing. This distinction between evidence and structure constitutes a first step towards breaking narratives down into heterogeneous components from which oral historians fabricate them, some elements from the past (therefore 'evidence') and others from the present (and therefore not 'evidence')."[139]

The debate on the limitations and potential use of oral traditions would continue in years to come. The impact of Structuralism however, did not stop there. One has to remember that both Structuralism and Marxism developed in the context of a wider epistemological crisis in the social sciences. In this context, Marxism seemed to offer a viable way of producing history. Structuralism, on the other hand, set down the foundations for new approaches to the study of the past that, to a certain extent, denied this possibility. A new school of thought, Poststructuralism, emerged and questioned even further the role and validity of historical reconstruction. As a modern scholar said: "... both structuralism and poststructuralism can be positioned within the broad trajectory of a post-war Marxism that has taken the form of a sustained enquiry into concepts of history and even the possibility of its conceptualization."[140]

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[138] *Ibidem.*p.1.

[139] *Ibidem.*p.50.

[140] Young, R. *White mythologies: writing history and the west.* 1990. p.25. It is important to note that Young's general argument in this respect rejects a direct opposition between Marxism and history on the

In the middle of all these changes in the theory, definition and methodology of African History, many historians were still concerned with more practical and pressing matters. Among them was the need to produce works of synthesis that could bring together the large amounts of material that had been uncovered so far. The two major works in this tradition are the *Cambridge History of Africa* and *The General History of Africa* by UNESCO.

The historiographical complexity of both projects would be difficult to comprehend in a general work like this. There is, however, one aspect of both projects that was commented upon and that can tell us something about the development of a community of historians of Africa. The UNESCO *General History* was mainly written by African historians, while The *Cambridge History* was criticised for having too few of them. One reviewer wrote: "...would it be grudging or ungrateful to complain that of the distinguished contributors to this volume, not one is either African or resident in Africa?"[141]

This criticism of *The Cambridge History of Africa* illustrates the cracks that were beginning to open between historians who were working in Africa and those working in Europe and the United States. Lines would eventually be drawn between African and non-African historians. In the Preface to Volume 3, Fage and Oliver explain that in order to simplify the task of publishing the first five volumes "the direction of each volume was therefore entrusted to a volume editor who, in addition to having made a substantial contribution to the understanding of the period in question, was a man with whom the general editors were in close touch."[142] Given the political and economic circumstances in Africa and Europe during the 1970s, the contacts between historians working in Africa and Europe had been seriously affected. The number of European historians working in Africa had gone down and the opportunities to travel were reduced. In this context, the decision to work with "close" relations was bound to exclude a number of persons.

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one side and Structuralism and Theory on the other side. He explains how Marxism in itself contained elements that made history problematic and how structuralism was not as ahistorical as it has often been assumed. However, in the context of wider changes, I think a general distinction at this point is relevant, since it helps to emphasise the climate of uncertainty about the possibilities of producing any kind of objective or relevant history.

[141] Smith, R. "Review of *The Cambridge History of Africa. c.1600-c. 1790.Vol 4.*" *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria.* 8, (1), 1975. p. 150.

[142] Oliver, R. & J. Fage. "Preface." *The Cambridge History of Africa. From 1050 to c.1600. Vol. 3.* 1977.

This is not meant as a justification of such decision, but as a commentary on the change in the nature of the academic community that was examined in the last chapter. The community of the 1970s was larger, but it had also lost many of the links that had characterised it in the previous decade. The exchange of ideas and people between Europe and Africa had seriously slowed, and the idea that Africans and non-Africans had essentially different approaches to the study of the African past was beginning to emerge.

The emergence of these ideas is significant because it contributed to the notion that African History should develop a specifically African approach if it was to be truly representative of the African past. As the community of historians of Africa became larger and the opportunities to conduct research became more unequal, between American and British historians on the one hand and African historians on the other, the emphasis on this kind of discourse also increased.

It was seen in the last section how the discourse of relevance became more important for scholars concerned with the study of Africa in the context of declining financial and institutional support. One can also see how this language became more important in the evaluation of historiographical methods such as Marxism and underdevelopment. By emphasising the relevance or non relevance of these approaches, historians neglected to explore the practical problems of doing history in and about Africa. Moreover, by rejecting Marxism for its European origins, historians encouraged the view that the study of Africa was to be approached form a "unique" African perspective. The following decades will see the strengthening of this discourse not because of its academic merits, but because of the complex politics of African studies.

CHAPTER V

African studies and the imperatives of African History.

We have seen in previous chapters how the link between African History and the notions of "relevance" and "people's history" has been constantly emphasised. We have also seen how this tendency increased as the competition for resources grew stronger and the epistemological foundations of the discipline were challenged. The last two decades of this century have seen the continuation of these tendencies. However, there have been some important changes. The fact that the vast majority of the research on African History is being produced in the United States and Europe has had a significant effect on the field. The definition of African studies and its importance to the American scene have encouraged the view that Africa is a particular object of study. It cannot be understood by using the conventional epistemological tools. Thus, traditional disciplines, such as History, have to search for radically new ways of approaching the continent. This belief has also led to questions about who is entitled to produce knowledge about Africa. This has been particularly explosive in the United States where the tension between African and African American studies has been escalating since the 1960s. With an increasing number of African academics migrating to American universities the situation has only become more difficult. The size and importance of the American system have increased the visibility of the debates and problems that characterise the study of Africa in the United States. We will see how an important part of these discussions have been dominated by the issues of relevance and authenticity, and how these have been portrayed as the ultimate imperatives for African studies.

Part 1.- Institutional decline and the relevance of African studies.

A) African intellectuals and the defence of African studies.

The 1980s saw the economic and social conditions in Africa get worse. Often this has been denominated as the "lost decade".

"After the largely positive economic and social developments of the 1960s and 1970s, Africa began to loose ground in the 1980s: economic progress turned into economic decline; social development into social decay."[1]

The 1990s saw some improvements, although this was also the decade of the Liberian civil war, the collapse of Sierra Leone, the civil war in Zaire, and the massacres in Rwanda. In this context the debates among African intellectuals became mainly focused on issues of democratisation, political, economic and social development. In the words of Archie Mafeje the issues that were paramount to Africans are: "a) a militant anti-imperialism which is not necessarily socialist; b) rejection of the hegemony of the unitary state and a demand for democratic pluralism instead."[2] These concerns however, are more revealing of the discussions of some African intellectuals, most of which do not work in African institutions, rather than the day to day preoccupations of African people. The sad truth is that most scholars working in African institutions have little opportunities to conduct research and their concerns are more immediate and pragmatic.

"Economic austerity by itself has turned out to be a powerful tool for apoliticism and deradicalization. Collapsing infrastructures, declining level of services and heavier teaching loads have kept academics working much harder with less to show for it. The fear of unemployment has kept academics compliant; most are obliged to debase their work by self imposed censorship. Some academics are trying to deal with the problem by moving into the private sector as professionals, entrepreneurs and consultants on a part-time or full-time basis."[3]

Universities have been particularly hard hit by the imposition of economic policies by international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These institutions have demanded "budgetary discipline and academic relevance" from universities. African scholars, however, have criticised the notion of academic relevance presented by these institutions as guided by a "developmental logic". According to this criticism, under these policies African universities were seen as merely the producers of manpower. Thus, emphasis was put on the training of engineers, doctors, civil servants, etc.

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[1] Hyden, G. "African studies in the 1990s. Between Afro-pessimism and Amero-skepticism." *African Studies Review*. 39, (2), 1996. p.1.

[2] Mafeje, A. "Beyond academic freedom: the struggle for authenticity in African social science discourse." Mamdani, M. & M. Diouf (eds.) *Academic freedom in Africa*. 1994. p. 67.

[3] Ake, C. " Academic freedom and material base." Mamdani, M. & M. Diouf (eds.) *Academic freedom in Africa*. 1994. p.24.

Training in history and the humanities, particularly at the graduate level, was seen as a luxury that African universities could not afford. As Mamdani pointed out, it was "a return to the developmental logic of the independent state, but without vision or ambition."[4]

The limitations suffered by academics have prompted the creation of new kinds of institutions.[5] These institutions have been quite vocal in advocating the creation of a more relevant and authentic approach to the social sciences in the African context. Talking about the achievements of these institutions Zenebeworke Tadesse says:

"...the magnitude, diversity, and vibrancy of associational life cannot longer be subsumed within state-centric, developmentalist methodologies. As generalizations about the "Third World" cease to hold sway, African researchers are being forced to reexamine the theoretical terrain, free, at last, of [sic] the illusions of imitating foreign intellectual trends -and in the process, one hopes, creating a richer African social science tradition."[6]

CODESRIA has been particularly active in promoting the debate of new ideas on History, African studies and democracy. Its publications show an attempt to address "African" agendas through the reformulation of social and historical research.[7] Their discussions often emphasise the issues of "lack of relevance" and intellectual and financial dependency. An example of this appears on their

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[4] Mamdani, M. "Introduction: the quest for academic freedom." Mamdani, M. & M. Diouf (eds.) *Academic freedom in Africa.* 1994. p.3.

[5] Examples of these are the Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research (CODESRIA from here) based in Dakar; the Southern Africa Regional Institute for Policy Studies (SARIPS/SAPES), the Centre for Basic Research in Kampala; and organisations of professionals such as the African Association of Political Science (AAPS), and the Association of African Women for Research and Development (AAWORD).

[6] Tadesse, Z. "From euphoria to gloom? Navigating the murky waters of African academic institutions." Martin, W.G. and M.O. West (eds.) *Out of one, many Africas. Reconstructing the study and meaning of Africa.* 1999. p.152.

[7] CODESRIA was organised under the leadership of Samir Amin, Justinian Rweyemanu, Abdullahi, Bujra and Thandika Mkandawire in 1973. It defines itself as a "Panafrican non-governmental organisation." Its objectives are: "facilitating research, promoting research-based publishing and creating multiple fora geared towards the exchange of views and information among African researchers." This views can be found in the *CODESRIA Bulletin* and in the website of the organisation. Some of its publications have been important to put forward new ideas and concerns that emanate from the needs of democratization and social and cultural development, in their relation to research in history and the social sciences. *Vid.* Mamdani, M.& M. Diouf (eds.) *Academic freedom in Africa.* 1994., and Zeleza, P.T. *Manufacturing African Studies and Crises.* 1997.

discussion of the issue of academic freedom in Africa. In discussing this idea, the contributors to this debate clearly put forward their views that research about Africa has to be first and foremost "relevant" to the African people.

"How can we justify academic freedom beyond our own self-interest? Only by showing that it is in the interest of a larger society. That requires on our own part the transformation of academic freedom from a right to a responsibility. Responsibility to whom, to do what? It seems to me that the answer must be responsibility to the public interest. If that is true, then academic freedom must somehow engage the interests, values, aspirations and potentialities of our people -bearing in mind that "our people" are typically peasants who are objectively malnourished, unschooled and in poor health, confronting nature in its crude immediacy in a strenuous struggle for survival which yields at best the most elementary necessities."[8]

This presentation of the notion of relevance reveals how problematic it is. Who is to determine what is "the public interest"? Surely, Ake must know that what he calls "our people" are actually a cluster of diverse and complex societies that would find it quite difficult to agree on their common "interests, values, aspirations and potentialities." Thus one can see the problems of using this notion of relevance as the foundation of research and social science in Africa.

Criticism was also directed at the institutions responsible for the production of knowledge, mainly universities. Much of the debate has focused on the question: Is it possible to produce relevant knowledge about Africa in institutions that are basically a Western creation? This reveals the view that universities and the scholars who work in them are not only economically dependent but also intellectually linked to notions of knowledge and relevance that originated in Africa.

"We have also attempted to show that academic freedom has to be related to intellectual independence. Unfortunately, the very concept of a university in Africa is culturally dependent. The African university is still a subsidiary of a cultural transnational corporation called the Western academic system. Can there be meaningful academic freedom when there is so much intellectual imitation?"[9]

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[8] Ake, C. *Op.cit.* 1994. p.22.

[9] Mazrui, A.A. "The impact of global changes on academic freedom in Africa." Mamdani, M. & M. Diouf (eds.) *Academic freedom in Africa.* p.139.

Here again we see the debate focusing on a rather unclear notion of "intellectual independence". It is simply not clear to me on what grounds one can define a university as essentially African, European or otherwise. How can a university become truly African? Does it need to reject the epistemological values of the West? Are not those values also part of its historical experience? The attempt to give a clear-cut definition of what is African, particularly in such an abstract context, seems to me a false problem.

The issue of authenticity in African universities brings up the question of what is African culture and how does it relate to intellectuals and their work? This question has prompted some intellectuals to advocate that the way to achieve an analysis of Africa that is useful and relevant is to return to the values of an "African culture". The emergence of popular culture in the form of music and other artistic forms have been interpreted by academics as a cultural revivalism in Africa that is leading the way for intellectuals to return to the values and concerns of African peoples. One aspect that often comes into this kind of discussions is languages and their role in the Africanisation of knowledge.

"African reliance on foreign languages for research and teaching is almost absolute. Can there be adequate academic liberty when there is so much linguistic dependency?"[10]

Language and culture are very problematic issues in the African context. To talk about a unique African culture is absurd in a continent that is not just hugely diverse but also in a period defining social and national identities. Language is something that can be used for domination, but there is no historical evidence that supports the view that the adoption of the language of the coloniser has always curtailed possibilities of cultural development or political liberation. After three hundred years of Spanish colonisation most of Latin American countries achieved not only independence but have also developed a rich cultural life. Its literature, which is mostly written in Spanish, is a clear example of this. Our understanding of language and culture in Africa tells us that these are not defined units from which one can draw elements that are essentially African just as if one was picking apples from a basket. On the contrary, these are processes in constant change that should be the object of our research rather than the foundation of it.

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[10] *Ibidem.*

In this respect, Mafeje is probably right when he says: "It must be admitted that there is a certain falsity in the position of these intellectuals. The preoccupation with African culture is peculiar to them as part of a petty bourgeois elite who do not live African culture but merely talk about it."[11]

These opinions reveal how there is a real interest among African intellectuals, such as Ake, Mafeje, Mazrui and Mamdani, on presenting the issues of relevance and authenticity as the main imperatives of social research in Africa. Since I am sure none of them would deny the many problems involved with these ideas, one has to wonder why they still present them as vitally important. The answer to this question may be found in the need of African academics to construct niches of research in which their views about Africa cannot be contested or critically reviewed. After all, if "African culture" is to be the very foundation of knowledge about Africa who is better suited to talk about it than Africans themselves. At least this is the theory. Additionally, by portraying this "authentic" African knowledge as "relevant" these intellectuals are also able to secure positions in North American or European universities and to obtain financial support for their endeavours. In the end, institutions such as CODESRIA are a costly business. The general understanding is that CODESRIA funds come from donations of African governments, bilateral aid agencies, private foundations, membership fees and revenues from sales and publications. I was unable to find more precise information about where the money comes from and in what proportions. It is interesting to note though that many CODESRIA publications give recognition to the financial aid received from organisations such as the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation (SAREC), the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Ford Foundation, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Danish Agency for International Development (DANIDA).[12] This obviously does not prove that these organisations are the main supporters of CODESRIA, but it does raise the question of how independent CODESRIA really is. Thus, instead of Tadesse's questions: "Are such independent research centres likely to grow in number and forge a culture of critical enquiry and cumulative knowledge base?

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[11] *Ibidem.* p. 64.

[12] In 1997 CODESRIA initiated a process to create an endowment fund that can ensure the continuation of CODESRIA's work. As part of this process, a report was published entitled *CODESRIA to the Millenium.* Unfortunatley, I have been unable to obtain it. But it apparently contains more detailed information about the way in which CODESRIA is funded.

How autonomous -that is, nondonor driven -are they likely to remain?"[13] I would ask how independent they really are? And are they really promoting a culture of critical enquiry? It seems obvious to me, from the debates examined before, that by focusing on the issues of relevance and authenticity they are actually moving away from any serious attempt to critically examine knowledge about Africa.

Moving away from these issues let us turn now to what has happened to African History in African universities. Put succinctly, little research has been possible in places like Legon and Dar es Salaam, and in South Africa the end of apartheid and the process of democratisation have put the study of African History under pressure.

During the 1970s Legon saw many confrontations between the Government, and students and university workers. In 1981 a new military government seized power, this time under Lt. J.J. Rawlings. As early as 1982 the university was forced to temporarily suspend its activities.[14] The longest closure came in 1983 after the Government abolished all the university councils in the country and the National Council for Higher Education. This caused several complaints from the three universities in the country and later caused disagreements between the students and the government. Students went on to demonstrate in May 1983 and the Government responded by occupying the university and effectively closing it. It was not reopened until March 1984.[15]

The main concerns among members of staff in the History Department were the excessive teaching loads due to the lack of staff.[16] The current head of Department, Dr. Akosua Perbi, remembers that at the beginning of the 1980s the staff of the department decreased from 14 to 5 members. The number of students had however, been going up. In 1995, for example she had something in the region of 300 students. This left her virtually no time for research.[17]

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[13] Tadesse, Z. *Op,cit.* 1999. p.149.

[14] Agbodeka, F. *A history of the University of Ghana.* 1998. p. 229.

[15] *Ibidem.* p.230.

[16] Interview with R. Addo-Fening. April 22, 1999. Interview with Akosua Perbi. April 27, 1999.

[17] Interview with A. Perbi. April 27, 1999.

The increase in student numbers, however, does not mean that there is more interest in history as a subject. Most of these students will not choose history as a major and few of them will go into graduate education. Dr. Perbi pointed out that the department has had a problem in having to accept students who choose to go into history as a way of getting into university. Thus, the quality of their students also has suffered. Mrs. Perbi hopes that new changes introduced in education policies will allow the department to require that students who want to go into the History Department should have an A-level in history. This opinion may appear conservative and it does not address the most important issue, which is lack of teachers and not excess of students. In the end, it is simply too difficult to attract good students into history, mainly because the possibilities of getting a good job with a relatively good salary are better in other fields.[18]

Members of the Department were also aware of the need to address new areas of history. Recently, new courses on the History of Western Medicine and the History of Women have been introduced. Most teachers know that more could be done if they had more staff. Unfortunately these concerns are poorly reflected in the research that is done. This continues to be focused on the political histories of local communities. There is also a pressing need to update library resources. This does not only affect teaching; it also curtails the chances of members of staff to publish their work. Their experiences in this area have shown that they always seem to be out of date on the most recent trends of scholarship and this becomes a real problem when it comes to publishing in recognised journals.

Financial stringency also had a crippling effect in the University of Dar es Salaam. The money allocated for education in the national budget went from 14% in 1970/71 to 4% in 1989/1990.[19] Funding for higher education suffered even more with the introduction of economic reforms by the World Bank and IMF under the program of structural adjustment after 1986. Paradoxically, these reforms are unlikely to result in either the expansion of higher education or in the improvement of its quality.[20]

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[18] Interview with A. Perbi. April 27, 1999.

[19] Itandala, A.B. "Impact of the one-party and multi-party politics on higher education in mainland Tanzania." *Tanzania Zamani.* 1, (4), 1996. p. 23.

[20] *Ibidem.* p.23.

The situation in the History Department started to look seriously wrong. Student numbers went down. In 1982-83 the Department reported that applications for doctoral work were declining.[21] In 1993 members of staff noted that the number of students enrolled in history courses had declined significantly. In considering the reasons for this decline they blamed the "arbitrary designation of some discipline [s] (including history) as irrelevant by policy makers..."[22] The declining trend continued and in 1994 it was reported that there were no history majors in that year.[23]

The adverse economic situation was also reflected in the quality of teaching. The continued concerns with Marxist history and the criticism of so-called bourgeois historiography continued to be at the centre of the teaching philosophy of the department. Unfortunately, it was difficult for lecturers to incorporate new perspectives on Marxism and social history into their teaching and research. This was the result of lack of resources to acquire books and journals that could expose both teachers and students to new ideas. Thus, the teaching and general philosophy of the department started to look more and more anachronistic. This can be seen in some External examiners' reports. In 1989 the department reported that the external examiner had "noted that candidates were unfamiliar with what is happening outside Dar es Salaam, so they cite sources available only in Dar es Salaam."[24] Another examiner noted that students were merely reproducing the debates encouraged by their teachers: "I appreciate very much the difficult circumstances in which the learning process takes place -i.e. a shortage of books. This makes the candidates overly dependent on the lecturers' notes. My own feeling is that the lack of resources hampers individual initiative. Students tend to echo the lectures because there is nothing else to fall back to."[25]

The economic situation was also having an adverse effect in the development of research among lecturers. Even with substantial archival and oral resources at hand, historians simply could not afford the time to attempt these ventures. More

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[21] University of Dar es Salaam. *Annual Report.* 1982-83. p.52.

[22] Minute May 7, 1993. *Departmental Meeting Minutes.* UDS.

[23] Minute November 11, 1994. *Departmental Meeting Minutes.* UDS.

[24] Minute April 11, 1989. *Departmental Meeting Minutes.* UDS.

[25] History Department. *External Examiner's Report.* 1982-1983. p.1. UDS.

than ever time was money and, increasingly, time that could have been spent on research was being spent on second jobs and other ways in which historians tried to complement their income.

The records show that members of the department were concerned by the decline in research activities. It seems clear that historians were aware of the need to update their perspectives. However, these attempts are also often overshadowed by the discussion of other pressing issues. Particularly important in the records are the potential links between the History Department and other universities.[26] Another issue that often emerges in the records is the relationship between the department and their donors. One example of the difficulties in maintaining these relationships can be appreciated when the Department opened a new Archaeology Unit. The Archaeology Unit was opened with the support of the Ford Foundation (through FAPA) and Brown University. It was opened in 1985-1986 and throughout its life it has depended on external support. The main problems between the History Department and those lending help to the Archaeology Unit were related to the control of the funds. In 1995, for example, members of staff discussed the fact that donors were making their help conditional on the funds being controlled by the unit itself. The University, on the other hand, opposed this idea.[27] There are other instances in which donor agencies registered their disapproval of the way in which funds were administered and accounted for.[28] It is impossible from the records to obtain a clear picture of the many sides of this relationship. What does become clear is that it was far from being an ideal state of affairs and that it put significant stress in the running of departmental activities.

In more recent times, historians in Dar es Salaam have started to explore the introduction of new perspectives and courses. There has been particular interest in introducing new courses in gender and the environment.[29] The main problem for the opening of such courses is that of obtaining trained staff able to teach them.

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[26] These discussions included links with Bergen University, University of Helsinki, University of Natal and the University of Florida.

[27] Minute June 7, 1995. *Departmental Meeting Minutes*. UDS.

[28] Minute February 17, 1995. *Departmental Meeting Minutes*. UDS.

[29] Interview with A. Tambila. March 4, 1999.

It also became clear from the interviews that economic history continues to be the main area of research in the Department. However, one thing has changed. Historians do not seem so concerned with issues of theory. Dr. Tambila for example, is still concerned with the little attention that has been given to the study of Labour in Tanzania, and is looking forward to going back into that research. At the same time, he has also been interested in issues of agriculture and food production, particularly rice.[30] From talks with other members of the department it became clear to me that there is a trend to promote more local research and there was talk about projects on the relationship between communities and the environment or about the development of slave trade networks in the eighteenth century.

The best example of how times have changed in Dar es Salaam is the relatively small impact that the work of Wamba-dia-Wamba had on other members of the department. I was unable to talk to him, although his work reproduces some of the debates that were examined at the beginning of this section.

"'Social sciences' in their 30 years or so of institutional development don't [sic] seem to have changed much in terms of their ability to provide to countries the necessary social capacity to control the movement of their social processes. Imperialist hands, seeking 'useful knowledge' about African societies for purposes of exploitation and legitimation of imperialist domination, 'social sciences' gave rise to African studies."[31]

Wamba's questions over the kind of "useful knowledge" produced by social science in the past illustrates how such notions, when seen from a moral perspective, as he does, are open to all kind of interpretations. When it comes to history, Wamba formulates quite clearly what, in his view, constitutes good history: "It is useless to base superiority of a particular historical knowledge solely on the scientificity of the methodology used to produce it. As a guideline of definitive political actions... historical knowledge (a physical theory is not a guideline to physical action), historical knowledge is based on the correctness of political actions... Can 'true history of Africa be done outside of the masses of

[30] Interview with A. Tambila. March 4, 1999.

[31] Wamba-dia-Wamba, E. "History of neo-colonialism or neo-colonialist history? Self determination and history in Africa". Seminar paper. University of Dar es Salaam, History Department. 1983.

African peoples' participation?...Outside of Africa people's liberation (real) movement and struggles, there is no real foundation to 'true history of Africa'."[32]

If I understood right (and reading Wamba's work is never easy) he is actually saying that the only valid foundation for historical knowledge lies on the moral and political imperatives of Africa's liberation, whatever these may be. Once again, the discourse of relevance presented here fails to explain how this position can guide any real research, how it can be used to evaluate any specific piece of work, or why these standards should be applied to Africa and not to other areas of research.

It is clear that too much emphasis has been given to the issues of relevance and authenticity among African intellectuals. It seems clear that such discourses have no intention of understanding or even exploring the particular problems of doing research in Africa. Rather they are useful to preserve niches of research and secure funding for those scholars who can proclaim to be in favour of relevant and authentic research.

B) Africanisation in the new South Africa.

The end of apartheid in South Africa marked the beginning of a transformation in the ways in which social research was conceived and organised. Everything from the structure of universities to the content of curricula has been questioned. Particularly significant in this process has been the attempt to understand South Africa's past as part of African History and not just as an exceptional case. It is still early to see the results of these changes. In the following paragraphs I will look at some of the consequences that have so far appeared in the case of UCT.

Since the 1980s there have been two fundamental forces operating in the transformation of South African universities. First, the need to reduce costs given the continuous cuts in the budgets of universities. Second, a drive to Africanise "historically white" institutions. Both trends were accelerated after 1994.

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[32] *Ibidem.* pp.28-29.

In this context, debates in South African universities have been concerned with the issue of how to achieve Africanisation in an economically constrained environment. The problem has been further complicated by the fact that there was no clear idea about what Africanisation meant. While some assumed that it was simply the incorporation of African students and African staff, others thought that it implied a radical transformation of the structures and values of the system of higher education.

"The transformation of academic practices in post-apartheid South Africa would not come to much if it were restricted to incorporating members of marginalised groups into existing structures. The rules sustaining these structures, their norms and standards, and their relations to the society at large must also be examined as they reflect a particular model (borrowed largely from Britain) that may not necessarily address local concerns."[33]

Towards the end of the 1970s UCT was hit by consistent cuts in the amount of money received from the Government. During the 1980s these forced the university to explore new forms of administrative organisation that could allow for a better utilisation of resources. We will look at the effects of these policies on the teaching of African History and the general operation of the History Department.

In the Annual Report to the Senate in December 1986 it was reported that the History Department had changed the organisation of its second and third year courses. Such courses were changed from a yearly to a semesterised system. This allowed the department to offer a wider variety of courses without significant increases in staff. It was also reported that a single major in history, that would incorporate the traditional major in African History, had been introduced.[34]

In the last chapter we saw the difficulties of integrating African History into the mainstream curriculum. The approval of this unified major in history came only after earlier proposals from the department to turn the African History course

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[33] Greenstein, R. "The future of South African past." *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 22, (2), 1996. p. 331. See also Foner, E. "'We must forget the past': history in the new South Africa." *South African Historical Journal*. 32, (May), 1995. 163-176. Moulder, J. "'Africanising' our universities; some ideas for a debate." *Theoria*. 72, 1988. pp. 1-15.

[34] "Annual Report to Senate for the period January to December 1986." *Transactions of the Board of the Faculty of Arts*. UCT.

from a specialised advanced course into a first year course. In 1983 the then Head of Department, Prof. Basil le Cordeur, proposed a revised syllabus with a General Course on African History in the first year. The second year was to be centred on South Africa and the third was composed by specialised courses and seminars.[35] For the first time, the teaching of South African History was presented as part of the history of Africa.

These innovations in African History were not the only ones introduced in this period. The records reveal that a significant number of courses were being introduced at the same time. It is evident that the new organisation by semesters did produce diversity and flexibility. Most importantly, however, it is also clear that historians were keen to incorporate new themes, and new ways of understanding the role of history.

The main research priorities in the department also experienced some changes. In 1985, the Five-Year Plan for research included oral history and popular history as priorities for research. However, urban history related to Cape Town and the Western Cape continued to be the major concern.[36] Although this document does not reflect the diversity of the research produced by the department, it reveals that, despite the increased importance given to African History in the department, this area had not yet become a research priority. The reasons for this are not clear, although I am inclined to believe that it was due to research priorities being set around the interests and expertise that already existed among members, rather than from the need to develop new areas. Later it will be seen how this became a problem within the History Department.

As the 1990s approached, the financial difficulties of the University increased forcing it to take a number of cost-cutting decisions. One that was particularly important for the History Department was the closure of the Economic History Department. In 1991 the Dean reported that this Department was under review by the Academic Planning Committee. It had become clear through a number of

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[35] Memorandum, B. Le Cordeour to Dean. April 20, 1983. Agenda. April 26, 1983. *Transactions of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* UCT.

[36] Memorandum B.A. le Cordeur to the Faculty Officer. History Department Five Year Plan. June 26, 1985. Dean's Advisory Committee, Agenda. July 29, 1985. *Transactions of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* UCT.

meetings with members that the situation within the department had become rather difficult.[37]

"The problems had arisen partially due to the nature of the discipline Economic history itself changing, which was an international development. There were different emphases of different universities, either for Economic history to be grouped with history or with Economics, or to remain a separate department. At UCT the staff of the department was divided in their emphases towards either Economics or History, and the split was therefore unavoidable."[38]

As a result of this Prof. I.H. Phimister, Drs. H. Bradford, W.R. Nasson and A. Majer joined the History Department. Years later, when the History Department came under review, the integration of these new members was quoted as a source of tension.[39] It is difficult to pinpoint the nature of such difficulties from the records. Some would argue, however, that the radical approach that characterised the Economic History Department and the more liberal perspective by which the History Department was identified might have had something to do with this. I am however, reluctant to overstate the importance of such differences. It is my opinion that the general climate of instability and change might have been responsible for the difficulties of all parties involved in adapting to the new and enlarged Department.

In 1993 changes started to occur at a faster rate. The Faculty of Arts went into a process of self-review. This process was conducted through the creation of three task forces. Each was concerned with the review of Literary and Cultural Studies, Language Studies, and Historical Studies respectively.[40] The first two made their recommendations in April 1994. The Task Group on Historical Studies, however, reported that: "The historical disciplines working group has not yet achieved a consensus on a direction forward for the historical disciplines, and it is clear that there are divergent opinions, both within the History Department, and between

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[37] As far as I know this was the only department of Economic history in an African university.

[38] Minute August 6, 1991. *Transactions of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* UCT.

[39] Strategic Planning Committee. "Planning Review of Historical Studies at UCT. Appendix I. Recommendations from the Strategic Planning Committee." Principal's Circular. October 28, 1998. I need to thank Prof. Nigel Worden for facilitating me copies of this and other documents that had not yet been made available in the archives.

[40] "Annual Report to Senate for the Period January to December 1994." *Transactions of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* 1994.

departments."[41] There were two main areas of disagreement. First, on how to co-ordinate the teaching of historical disciplines. The second, if the creation of a joint major on the historical disciplines was advisable.[42] After further discussions, a report was produced in August 1995 where some recommendations were made to rationalise the teaching of historical subjects.[43] The main recommendation in this document was in favour of creating a School of Historical Studies. This proposal developed into a Historical Disciplines Committee. By November 1995, it had not been possible to reach an agreement on the way in which to co-ordinate History subjects.[44]

The difficulties with reaching an agreement reveal the complexity of rationalising the needs of the historical disciplines. In this group one could find Art history, Hebrew and Jewish Studies, Archaeology, Classics and History itself. Their requirements and objectives were different and to find the right way of bringing these together was bound to be difficult. There were also the problems of justifying the study of history in a university that was in financial problems, and the serious issue of unemployment among History graduates. How can one make the study of history marketable even for students that do not intend to follow a career as historians? What kind of skills should the study of history emphasise to prove its relevance and importance in modern South Africa? And, how can a change towards a more pragmatic education be used to promote the study of history at a professional level?

In March 1996 members of staff received an interim report for discussion from the Academic Planning Committee. This Report made a case for a new academic plan that could allow UCT to face its financial difficulties and the structural changes demanded by democratisation.[45] Of the principles that guided this plan it

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[41] "Interim Report from the Convenor of the Historical Studies Task Group." Agenda August 1995. *Transactions of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* 1995.

[42] *Ibidem.*

[43] "Report of the Historical Studies Working Group." Dean's Circular September 13, 1995. *Transactions of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* 1995.

[44] Dean's Circular. November 8, 1995. *Transactions of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* 1995.

[45] Academic Planning Committee. "Academic Planning Framework. Interim Report for Discussion." March 13, 1996. p.1. *Transactions of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* 1996.

is important to emphasise three. First, a choice was made to make Programs the main unit of administrative organisation.

"The classical institutional structures are a source of inertia for planning academic programmes, despite their strengths in organisational terms; a focus on programmes, on the other hand, forces academic choices about priorities and strengths and allows greater flexibility to respond to changing academic needs."[46]

A second element was the financial resources of the University. According to this, there was a "requirement to use the budget as an agent of progress and institutional development rather than of random misery and frustration of aspirations."[47] The final guiding element was "history". In this respect the Committee admitted that this was "the most subtle and difficult of all...This dictates that UCT will be a university of Africa rather than, for example, Australia or Great Britain, that it must embody the aspirations of all South Africans and that it must serve to strengthen a new and fragile democracy."[48] These guiding principles are proof of the complexity of the situation in South African universities. The need for programs reflects the need of rationalising resources. The reference to "history" makes it clear that a tortuous search for a new identity for South African society had started.

The position of the History Department and the rest of those deemed to be historical disciplines was difficult in that they had to prove their importance in an environment where history was loosing ground to other areas. Thus, the challenge for these departments was to create a program that gave students the right balance of skills and specialised information. In 1997 the History Department presented a proposal for a BA degree in Historical Studies that was to be introduced in 1998.[49] This was an interim proposal introduced while the Program in Historical Studies was developed. The final draft was ready for submission in April 1998.

The new Program brought together the expertise of the departments of History, Archaeology, History of Art, Religious Studies, Classics, Hebrew and Jewish

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[46] *Ibidem.* p.3.
[47] *Ibidem.* p.4.
[48] *Ibidem.*
[49] Agenda, July 29, 1997. *Transactions of the Board of the Faculty of Arts.* 1997.

Studies. It also intended to encourage links between historical studies and the Social Sciences, Arts and Education. One important element of the new program is its attention to "skill development" as a way of addressing the issue of unemployment among graduates in these subjects. Thus the program emphasised the development of skills such as "find, process and analyse information, present this information in a structured and coherent form, and critically analyse information and argument in a variety of media."[50]Additionally, students would also develop certain abilities related to the historical discipline. For example, how to "contextualise the present and the future in the light of the past, be aware of the construction of history and social norms and able to critically analyse assumptions and methods of historical work, and recognise public representations of the past and engage with the applied use of history in fields such as tourism."[51]

Apart from the development of skills, the division of the information provided by the Program was organised in "streams". The streams proposed originally were: African and South African History, Archaeology, History of Art, History of Religions, Mediterranean History and Society, Modern and Contemporary Historical Studies and Social Science Education. It is important to note that the study of African and South African History were finally brought together.

This was an ambitious and groundbreaking course. It is too early to speculate about its future. Not even those involved in its creation are sure it will provide the expected results. But that is normal when new ground is being explored. The fact that the program has been the result of a dramatic challenge on the discipline of history may turn out to be a fortunate paradox. Maybe, this shakeout is what history and historians have been needing in order to come to terms with the fact that important changes need to be made to the ways in which academic history relates to the rest of the society.

In the midst of administrative and academic reforms, the History Department found itself in the middle of another debate. This time directly related to its attitudes towards African History. During the 1990s the Faculty of Arts had also been under review, and was in the process of becoming the Faculty of Social

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[50] "Proposal for a Historical Studies Programme to be introduced in 1999." p.1.

[51] *Ibidem.* p.4.

Sciences and Humanities. There was a proposal to introduce a core course called Introduction to Africa. Mahmood Mamdani, then chairman of the Centre for African Studies, was called to collaborate in the design of the course. Mamdani had joined UCT in 1996 and since then had been vocal about the changes that needed to be done to the area of African Studies in UCT.[52] These ideas would eventually put Mamdani in confrontation with the History Department.

The core of his argument was an attack on what he called South African exceptionalism.

"To create a truly African studies, one would first have to take head-on the notion of South African exceptionalism and the widely shared prejudice that while South Africa is part of Africa geographically, it is not quite culturally and politically, and certainly not economically. It is a point of view that I have found to be a hallmark of much of the South African intelligentsia, shared across divides: white or black, left or right, male or female."[53]

Thus, Mamdani's intention was, from the very beginning to move away from the idea that South Africa's past represented an exceptional case in the history of the continent. On the contrary, he wanted to promote the idea that South Africa's experience could be understood within similar trends of change to those seen in the rest of Africa.

"Did not apartheid, as a form of state, seek to reproduce race as an identity that would unite its beneficiaries and ethnicity as an identity that would unite its victims? To what extent, should apartheid not be understood as the generic form of the colonial state in Africa, rather than being an exception to it?[54]

When the Foundation course was first presented, Mamdani found serious problems in the way it portrayed Africa's experience. Mamdani's most important criticism was the lack of a "historical sociology." He thought the course, particularly the first part, did not promote an analytical understanding of the processes that affected the development of African societies and thus obscured the relationship between these and the processes experienced in South Africa. Moreover, he said, "the absence reflects a key weakness of the History Department

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[52] Mamdani, M. "Centre of African Studies: Some preliminary thoughts". Seminar paper. November 29. University of Cape Town, Centre of African Studies. 1996.

[53] *Ibidem.* p.3.

[54] Mamdani, M. "Is African studies to be turned into the new home for Bantu education at UCT?" Seminar paper. April 22. University of Cape Town, Centre of African Studies. 1998. p.4.

at UCT. The department has made choices over the past decade so that it has no one with a research focus on equatorial [sic] Africa. This is in sharp contrast to UWC, whose History Department invested resources precisely in that field."[55] Mamdani's alternative to the proposed course focused on the exploration of four debates in the intellectual history of Africa. The first was related to the problems of history and was linked to the work of Cheikh Anta Diop. The second was concerned with the nature of the colonial state, the third looked at the problem of historisicing the African experience through the analysis of gender relations, and the fourth looked at the general reconstruction of Africa as an object of study.[56]

Mamdani's "sociology of history" was to be centred on an examination of debates among African scholars that he thought contributed to the historical understanding of Africa.

"I want to link Diop to one of his sympathetic critics, Ifi Amaudime. Ifi's work focuses on the history of gender relations. Starting with a distinction between biological sexuality and social gender, she argues that the history of gender in Africa is not the same as that in Europe. In the process she raises the larger question of the historicity of the African experience. In doing so, she moves away from both Euro-centric and nationalist or negritude historians. Ironically, both Euro-centrics and nationalists were content simply to point out that Africa had cities, an urban life, specialized crafts and international trade. Her preoccupation as that of Diop, and the generation of historians like Wamba-dia-Wamba, Mamadou Diouf and Mohamed Mbodj, whether they agree with Diop or not, was to illuminate the specific trajectory -or trajectories- of the African experience. Like Diop, Amaudime too is concerned to go beyond archaeology and anthropology and construct a historical sociology of Africa."[57]

I find it difficult to see what is so original about the questions that Mamdani presents here. Has "the historicity of the African experience" not been the central concern of historians since the 1950s? It is simply not true that "Euro-centrics and nationalist" (whoever these may be) have been simply content with stating the existence of a historical experience. Understanding the African past, both as unique and as part of a wider historical process, has been a constant challenge for historians of Africa, more than for historians of any other part of the world.

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[55] *Ibidem.* p.6.

[56] *Ibidem.* pp.3-4.

[57] *Ibidem.*

Despite the vagueness of this proposal, Mamdani's opinion finally spelled out the irony of having a department of history in an African university where the majority of staff was concerned with research on South African History. However, for someone so concerned with historical understanding, he failed to recognise the process by which those limitations have developed. It is probably true to say that the department had failed to integrate the study of African and South African History, and that much of that failure could be blamed on the notion of South African exceptionalism. But there were other issues at play. Structural concerns related to the educational system in South Africa played an important role. The size of the department itself had been a significant obstacle until the last two decades, and the complex political situation in the country had operated against improving the profile of African History. I did not come across any evidence suggesting that recruitment policies were openly against the hiring of historians of Africa. It is always possible that these considerations existed in the minds of those in charge of recruiting new personnel, but there is no evidence to sustain such claim. It is probably true to say that the department did not embark on an very active search for a historian of tropical Africa, particularly since this was not one of the research priorities. However, given the difficult relations between South Africa and other African countries during apartheid, it would have been difficult to find a historian of tropical Africa willing to work in South Africa or who would have been acceptable to the South African government.

After all the problems that the History Department had faced, the University took the decision to review the Department. This occurred within the context of the formulation of a Strategic Planning Framework. The reviews were commissioned to assess the situation of "areas which are under stresses of different kinds and which are of such a nature that a clear way forward needs to be mapped sooner rather than later."[58] In the opinion of the Strategic Planning Committee, History was one of those areas.

"The present Department of History absorbed, with some difficulty, a group of senior Economic historians some time ago; attempts to fill the endowed King George V Chair of History have failed; the most recently appointed head of department asked to be allowed to stand down long before his term was completed; there is some controversy as to how African History should be

[58] Strategic Planning Committee. "Planning Review of Historical Studies at UCT. Appendix I. Recommendations from the Strategic Planning Committee." Principal's Circular. October 28, 1998.

approached in the post-1994 context, both by the Department of History and the Centre of African Studies...."[59]

The review was finished in October 1998. It started by emphasising the importance of historical studies in the context of the new South Africa.

"It is widely believed that history as a discipline is under very considerable pressure in contemporary South Africa, as witnessed by falling students numbers in the universities and the proposed replacement of history by general social studies in the schools. Yet at a time of rapid social and political change and the construction of new national mythologies to replace old, a critical approach to, and understanding of, the past is essential if the country is to have some perspective on the nature and direction of its transformation."[60]

The Committee praised the quality of the Department's work in terms of its innovative teaching, the research records of its members and its leadership in the formulation of the new Historical Studies Program. There were, however, some areas that needed to be addressed if resources were to be employed to their maximum capacity. Some problems that came to the attention of the committee were the lack of leadership, a poor sense of community among members, and the gender and racial profile of the staff, among others. On the crucial issue of the teaching program the Committee said:

"...the Committee is concerned that the temporal and geographic span of teaching and research in the Department is fairly limited even though the quality is not in question. Although the Committee realises that the lack of direct research expertise in a particular area does not preclude teaching in that area, it is noticeable -if understandable - that nearly all the research expertise in the department is focused on Southern Africa, and most of that on South Africa, and even the Cape. While this has built and enviable depth, the Committee shares concerns which were expressed that the department does not have a wider research and teaching expertise -notably relating to the African continent."[61]

In expressing these and other concerns the Committee took into account the problems faced by the department in the last two decades. Thus, it was able to contextualise these shortcomings and get a better understanding of the way in which the department had been unable to introduce African History. The issue of the lack of leadership and the poor sense of community account for the fact that,

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[59] *Ibidem.*

[60] Planning Review of Historical Studies. "Recommendations from the Strategic Planning Committee. Review of Historical Studies." Principal's Circular. October 28, 1998. p.2.

[61] *Ibidem.* p.4.

as Mamdani said, "decisions were taken", or rather decisions were not taken. It appears that in a department where leadership is not clearly defined and where members do not have the environment to take those decisions as a group, it would be difficult to formulate, let alone pursue, any long-term strategy. In these circumstances, things like actively recruiting new members of staff who may be seen as controversial, are the last things likely to be pursued.

The Committee also dealt with other issue related to the Africanisation of the University, namely the composition of the staff. The Committee recognised that the majority of the members of the department were white males. Moreover, the age profile militated against quick change, since the first retirement was then due in ten years. The Committee suggested the use of joint appointment and staff exchanges to achieve a more favourable distribution.[62] Despite this, the difficult economic situation operated against expansion and there was a growing feeling of apprehension among members of staff regarding the security of their positions.

The case of UCT clearly illustrates how the political transition to democracy resulted in a serious academic crisis. Rapid changes in the structure of the university created significant insecurity at various levels. A particularly strong challenge was raised against the discipline of history in general and the History Department in particular. This challenge put significant stress on members of staff, but it allowed tensions and problems that had been brewing in the department for some time to surface. It also forced the department to reflect on better ways of teaching and understanding the role of history in modern South Africa. The results of all these changes are still difficult to predict. However, it seems clear that the debates on "What is Africa?" that are having such an effect on South African universities will also affect the intellectual history of Africa as a whole.

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[62] *Ibidem.* p. 3.

C) African studies in Great Britain and the United States.

For British historians, the 1980s proved to be difficult years. The last chapter presented some of the problems universities had experienced. Unfortunately, for African studies worse was still to come. The Thatcher era was disastrous for the study of Africa. There were two reasons for this. First, there was a disdain and indifference towards Africa that characterised this regime: "While she was in charge, African studies had little hope of government sympathy."[63] Second, there was a systematic attempt to bring British universities under direct government control and severe budget-cuts were imposed.[64]

Although certainly not as bad as in African universities, the situation in Britain was not promising. Between 1977 and 1982 the proportion of the Social Science Research Council's budget devoted to African Studies decreased from 2.3 to 0.8%. This was translated into significant cuts on travel grants and libraries' funding. Important centres of research in African studies, such as Edinburgh and Birmingham, faced closure. Aberdeen's Department of Religious Studies was closed. At a time when many of the pioneers in African History were reaching retirement age, there were no funds available to replace them. The only two chairs designated to African History, those held by Roland Oliver and John Fage remained vacant after their retirement. When John Hargreaves retired early from Aberdeen and Paul Hair from Liverpool, they were not replaced by historians of Africa. All this was bad news for younger generations who became more disillusioned with the prospects of finding employment in academia.[65]

All these had a significantly bad effect on the reproduction of the field. Shrinking funding for post-graduate students combined with the lack of employment opportunities brought student numbers down. At Birmingham, recruitment for African Economic history fell to such a point that in 1986 there was not one first year Ph.D. student.[66] According to Richard Hodder Williams, between 1985 and

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[63] Fyfe, C. "The emergence and evolution of African studies in the United Kingdom." Martin, W.G. and M.O. West (eds.) *Out of one, many Africas. Reconstructing the study and meaning of Africa.* 1999. p. 58.
[64] *Ibidem.*
[65] McCracken, J. "African History in British universities; Past, present and future." *African Affairs.* 92, 1993. pp.242-243. Fyfe, C. *Op.cit.* 1999. p.59.
[66] McCracken, J. *Op.cit.* 1993. pp. 242-243.

1989 the number of specialists on Africa teaching in British institutions fell by nearly 16%.[67]

This was reflected in the research output. The number of articles written by scholars based in Britain and published in journals also based in Britain showed a significant decline. Between 1983 and 1993 approximately 197 articles were published in the *Journal of African History*. From these, only 47 were contributions by historians based in Britain. This represented 24% of the total. Contributions from scholars based in Africa were down to 46 articles while the majority of the articles published, 76, came from historians based in the United States and Canada. Other journals revealed similar trends.[68]

The 1990s saw a slight recovery. African History, in particular, has managed to maintain a significant presence in the system of higher education. Young scholars have been appointed to posts in African History and postgraduate enrolments have shown a modest recovery. The main emphasis, however, continued to be on undergraduate teaching.[69]

Despite the slight recovery the severe trends of the 1980s have revealed the fragility of the field. It has become more evident that the importance of African History and generally of African studies has not been established, and that the expansion and survival of the field depends on a better definition of why African History is relevant in Britain. It was at this juncture that students from African descent were being attracted to the field. This offered the opportunity to redefine the sense of relevance of the study of Africa in the British context. Despite the increased interest on the study of the Diaspora the tensions and contradictions seen for years in the United States have not yet been seen in Britain, although there is a danger they may soon appear.[70]

The situation at SOAS during the last twenty years reflected some of the trends described above. The report for 1980-1981 reported some significant cuts to the

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[67] *Ibidem.*

[68] *Ibidem.* p. 243-244.

[69] McCracken, J. *Op.cit.* 1993. p. 245.

[70] Fyfe, C. *Op.cit.* 1999. p.59-60.

sources of income for the school. First, there was a cut in the amount of money given to Universities aimed at preventing overseas student benefiting from British subsidies.[71] This was a significant blow to the school. Historically it had been an important centre for the training of overseas graduate students. It was seen before how many African scholars were trained at SOAS. Thus, the result of this policy undermined the historical role of SOAS in the training of scholars from all over the world. In addition to this, the government reduced the recurrent grant for universities by £30 million in 1980. This was the first of a number of cuts aimed to reducing the income of universities.[72]

The following year the school was faced with difficult decisions. Forty-two members of staff retired, but only ten of those were actually due to retire in this period. The remainder thirty-two took early retirement. Assuming that none of these posts was filled, the school would be able to reduce its establishment by 20% and thus avoid the need for compulsory redundancies.[73]

In 1986 a report on the review of the requirements of diplomacy and commerce for Asia and Africa was published. This report, produced by Sir Peter Parker,[74] was a welcome boost for those engaged in the study of Africa. It emphasised the importance of the knowledge of African and Asian languages for trade and diplomacy.

"I believe that the sharper our gift of tongues the sharper our competitive edge. This enquiry's evidence endorses that view. It shows that since Hayter, the intervening years has seen an unwitting retreat from the Scarbrough-Hayter principles. There has been an extensive, and in recent years quickening, erosion of our national capability in African and Asian language and area studies. And this is not happening as a matter of policy. It is the result of no clear policy."[75]

The effects of this report failed to reproduce the support and interest raised by its predecessors (Scarbrough, 1946, and Hayter, 1961). This was likely due to its

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[71] SOAS. *Report of the Governing Body, Statement of Accounts and Departmental Reports.* 1980-81. p.23. This policy had been introduced by the Labour government under the Secretary of Stateship of Shirley Williams.

[72] *Ibidem.*

[73] SOAS. *Report of the Governing Body, Statement of Accounts and Departmental Reports.* 1981-82. p.5.

[74] Sir Peter Parker was a SOAS graduate.

[75] Parker, P. Sir. *Speaking for the future. A review of the requirements of diplomacy and commerce for Asian and African languages and Area studies.* February, 1986. p.4.

particular concerns with Diplomacy and Commerce, and the fact that there are few links between these sectors and the academic world. But it may also be because it was not seen as a matter of national policy. As the author said, it had wide implications for both the Government and academics.

"The Conclusions/recommendations of this report have admittedly difficult implications for Government, for existing academic practices, and for the relationship of academic institutions to the business world. But these should be faced. Britain has an inherited strength in Oriental and African studies which is part of the national infrastructure of knowledge. This underpins an important practical field of our national training. Much of the system is now at risk, and this enquiry took place at the eleventh hour. The costs of keeping the system going are rather small compared with the potential benefits. It is absurd to let it run down."[76]

The Report did not produce any immediate improvements, although SOAS obtained some benefits. It was appointed, by the University Grants Commission, as the national centre for all Asian and African studies. The school also received extra funding that allowed it to create eighteen additional positions, and increase the student quota by one hundred and sixty two. The Library also received a special grant in recognition of its national role.[77] Although this was far from being a significant recovery it "was good for morale" and was the foundation for more modest achievements in the following decade.

The pressure on the school did not disappear though. In the years between 1992 and 1997 the Research Committee repeatedly reported a decline in the number of applications for research grants. It commented on the fact that more applications were aimed at writing up research material rather than embarking on new research projects. This was attributed to two factors. First, the high teaching loads made it very difficult for lecturers to write up their research. At the same time this delayed new research and prevented scholars from taking the time off needed for beginning new projects.[78]

Despite the general fall in the number of students choosing to do history nationally, the History Department registered an increase in the number of

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[76] *Ibidem.* p.13.

[77] SOAS. *Report of the Governing Body, Statement of Accounts and Departmental Reports.* 1986-87. p.4.

[78] SOAS. *Annual Register.* Part II. 1992/93-1996-97.

students in the early 1990s. Many of these were studying for joint degrees with other departments. The pressure on staff was significant. In 1990-91 the department reported: "When all categories of students are taken into account, the Department of History continued during the past session to deliver roughly 12% or so of the total teaching effort of the School on slightly less than the same percentage of the School resources, though the trend to contraction in staff numbers and the very marked expansion of students numbers now threatens a more disadvantageous disparity."[79]

In the field of African History the Department was moving into a period of transition. The retirement of Roland Oliver in 1986, Richard Gray in 1988, Andrew Roberts in 1998, Michael Brett in 2000 and Shula Marks highlighted the changes that had been occurring and those to come. Gradually, new members of staff have introduced new interests and approaches. Susan Martin worked on Gender, population and agriculture; David Anderson has encouraged work on urban and environmental history and on issues of identity formation in East Africa. Younger members that have recently joined the department like Wayne Dooling and John Parker are already bringing new ideas and perspectives.

This generation of scholars is entering the field in circumstances very different to those encountered by the pioneer generation. The emphasis on the training of undergraduates puts significant pressure on research. New ways of attracting more and better students into the field are constantly put under experimentation. The introduction of joint degrees has been successful in highlighting the importance of history in relation to other social sciences. But at a time when most of the social sciences and humanities are struggling to prove their value, this is of little consolation.

SOAS has continued to play an important role in the training of graduate students, although the numbers of doctoral degrees have been smaller than in earlier years.[80] There were roughly fifty doctoral degrees granted between 1980 and 1996, compared to forty-six degrees granted between 1970 and 1980.[81] Form

[79] SOAS. *Annual Register*. Part II. 1989/90-1990-1991. p.46.

[80] SOAS. *Annual Register*. Part III. 1994-1995.

[81] This is according to the degrees registered in the *Annual Report and Annual Register* of those years.

these, the majority were concerned with the Southern African region, particularly South Africa, but also Zambia, Namibia and Malawi. Next came West Africa where particular attention was given to Ghana, Sierra Leone and Nigeria. A small number of theses were also concerned with French West Africa. East Africa and North Africa came last, but the number of these concerned with East Africa is on the rise. The most significant trend, however, is related to the time periods in which these theses are interested. The vast majority covered the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and very few dealt with earlier periods of African History. Finally, one could see a significant focus on social and economic aspects of the past. Much attention was given to problems of social change in both rural and urban areas and to the study of the relations between these two environments. Social change was also related to the study of industrialisation, Islam, and missionary activities.

Despite the economic problems that have affected SOAS, it has remained an important centre for historical research. This has been possible thanks to the building up of a good library, the accessibility of important archival resources and the quality of its academic life which is reflected in the still important and lively African History Seminar.

As has been seen in previous chapters, there are some aspects that distinguish the study of Africa in the United States. First, the emphasis given to the area of African studies, second, the tension between this and the area of African-American studies. These characteristics have become more evident and problematic in the last two decades. The reason for this can be found in a combination of factors. The increasingly popular view of African studies as a self contained field that cannot be approached following the traditional epistemological values. Also, the need for those interested in the study of Africa to justify their work in a system of higher education that was increasingly more career oriented and geared towards the training of undergraduates rather than to the production and transmission of knowledge and the encouragement of critical thinking. Finally, the argument made by African-American scholars against the area of African studies accusing it of being disconnected from the needs of the African-American population. These elements have caused a debate in the American context that had been dominated by the need to portray the study of

Africa in the United States as something relevant. We saw earlier the problems involved with this concept, here I will look at how the debate has been conducted and I will try to explain why it has become central to the discourse of African studies in the United States.

There are a number of problems that have affected the study of History in the United States. There have been considerable financial constraints afflicting this area in the last twenty years. These have had a detrimental effect on the contacts between academics based in the United States and scholars working in Africa. Fundamentals, such as fieldwork and academic exchanges, have been increasingly difficult to pursue.[82] The worsening economic situation in Africa prompted an increase in the number of African scholars working in American institutions. Unfortunately, many of these scholars quite often find it difficult to adapt to the highly competitive and rapidly changing academic system and are often prompted to adopt the language of relevance and authenticity to justify their work and status.[83] Another issue at play is the fact that the academic system in the United States is "so massive as to generate its own intellectual dynamics independent of other (European or Africa) intellectual universes".[84] The situation for historians is aggravated by the emphasis that is given to African studies as a field. This has portrayed African History as a mysterious and obscure field that has little in common with other areas of historical research. Although there are individual attempts by historians of Africa to prove that African History has an intellectual value for other historians, the tendency to see it as a field guided by particular rules and justified by moral and political concerns is still far too common.

An example of how the debate became more focused on matters of relevance and social equality rather than on the intellectual validity of African History and other disciplines was the response to the article "Ghettoizing African History?" written

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[82] Newbury, D. "Africanist historical studies in the United States; metamorphosis or metastasis." Jewsiewicki, B. & D. Newbury (eds.) *African historiographies: what history for which Africa?* 1986. p. 155.

[83] *Ibidem.*p.161-162. Zeleza,P.T. *Op.cit.* 1997. p.21.

[84] Newbury, D. *Op.cit.* p.157. Bundy, C. "An image of its own past? Towards a comparison of American and South African historiography." *Radical History Review.* 46/47, 1990. p.131.

by Philip Curtin and published in 1995.[85] In this piece Curtin complained about the alleged practices by some universities to discriminate against white scholars. Talking about the growing interest in international studies and the increase in ethnic consciousness Curtin said:

"This two factors have helped create more university posts in African History, but they also have helped create demands from African-American students that courses in African History be tailored to meet the concerns of contemporary African-Americans. Students often demand that courses be taught by African-Americans or, when not many African-Americans candidates are available, by Africans, with whom students want to feel a common heritage. When these demands are put side by side with the laudable efforts by colleges and universities to increase the number of black faculty members, the result is often the ghettoization of African History."[86]

The article caused a strong reaction from African-American and African scholars who saw it as the final revelation of the fears, frustrations and insecurities of the white establishment of scholars working on Africa in the United States.

"In addition to casting light on the racial hierarchy and sentiments that pervade African Studies in the United States, the entire Curtin debate showed the extent to which Africanists' anxieties are indeed rooted in the realities of an uncertain future. The sources of these anxieties, however, are to be found not in an irrupting horde of Kente-clothed black scholars but rather in the abandonment of the field by powerful supporters as the academy proceeds to restructure bureaucratically and the federal government and private foundations establish new priorities."[87]

At the bottom of this debate one can certainly find the problem of resources. However, by emphasising this element of the problem the authors are hiding another equally important concern: to determine who is entitled to study Africa and what are the problems that the study of Africa should address.

From the point of view of African-American scholars, the main accusation against the scholarship on Africa was about the failure of the latter to adopt a Pan-African perspective. The adoption of this approach would justify the study of the African-

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[85] Curtin, P. "Ghettoizing African History." *Chronicle of Higher Education.*" March 3, 1995. pp. A44.

[86] *Ibidem.*

[87] Martin, W.G. & M.O. West. "Introduction: the rival Africas and paradigms of Africanists and Africans at home and abroad." *Out of one, many Africas. Reconstructing the study and meaning of Africa.* 1999. p.4.

American experience as part of the African past and would therefore be more relevant to African-Americans in the United States.

"...members of the predominantly white Africanist establishment have long sought to separate sub-Saharan Africa, the object of their study and research agendas, from the African diaspora and issues of race.
One result of this sundering of African studies from the extracontinental African world is the inability of Africanists to engage with, much less inform, what might be called a fourth wave of black nationalism in the United States..., marked by the burgeoning presence of black artists in literature, music, and film who often express relation to the ancestral continent."[88]

The question is: Why should this "ancestral continent" be the object of our study of Africa? Why is the study of sub-Saharan Africa not valuable on its own? Why is it that the study of Africa as a dynamic and changing continent cannot be relevant to African-Americans as well as white Americans, Chinese or Hispanic? In other words, why should the study of Africa be tailor-made to satisfy the concerns of one particular community? Why is it that we cannot see the history of Africa as something that can enrich our knowledge of world-history, increase our intellectual capacity for questioning and understanding, and reveal to us new aspects of the human experience? The troubling truth is that African studies has been seen, for too long, as a field that is approached for moral and political reasons, but quite poor in its academic contributions.

The response from the African studies establishment has, unfortunately, not questioned the notions of relevance and authenticity implied in the criticism raised by African-American scholars. On the contrary, the general discourse has been concerned with proving that African studies are still relevant not only to the general population but also to policy-makers. Once again, this discourse fails to explore the specific problems of scholars who study Africa and the contributions these have made to their particular disciplines. It appears that African studies is portrayed as a self-contained field of research that can only justify its existence through its relevance and not through the quality of its scholarship.

Previous chapters have described how programs of African Studies emerged and flourished under the sponsorship of Government and private foundations. It has

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[88] *Ibidem.* p.8.

also been seen how some programs like Northwestern saw some difficulties when this funding became more scarce and selective, and how difficult it proved to obtain long term commitments from the University. Two tendencies were observed. First, a greater emphasis on undergraduate education, and a stronger focus on the links between African Studies and the requirements of African American students. In the last twenty years, however, the changes in Government policies and priorities have become more apparent. This situation has caused a continuous debate on the ways in which the field of African Studies can redefine its institutional position and its intellectual value.

Views on this recent "crisis" have thus emphasised the effects that changing policies towards Africa have had on the status of African Studies. In 1993 the President of the African Studies Association stated: "The Association and Africanists assumed that Africa would be a growing priority of the United States, and that the support for African Studies would increase in real terms. Over the last two decades this has simply not happened..."[89] And he continued to conclude: "The commitment of federal government to African studies cannot be taken for granted, and the strength of the commitment of many African universities to African specializations is suspect as well."[90]

It became evident that new forms of support would have to be obtained. Some scholars thought that a way of redefining the value of the professional study of Africa was to have a larger and well-defined involvement in political matters.

"Africanists must now stand up and speak out on issues of our time. It is possible to maintain our academic integrity and engage in political activities. It is to climb down from our ivory towers and speak out on the issues which affect Africa. If we don't care, then there is little hope that the general public or our representatives in Washington will care (the latter will care even less.)"[91]

Scholars of Africa realised that they have made a fundamental mistake in confusing government priorities derived from the Cold War, with public interest in the field. This is not to say that the interests of the Cold War dictated the

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[89] Robinson, D. "The African Studies Association at age 35: Presidential address to the 1993 African Studies Association Annual Meeting." *African Studies Review*. 37, (2), 1994. p.7. Hyden, G. *Op.cit.* 1996. pp.12-13.

[90] Robinson, D. *Op.cit.* 1994. p.9.

[91] Bender, G.J. *Op.cit.* 1988. p.7.

priorities and interests of scholarship: "A major flaw in current geopolitical critiques of area studies lies in equating the field with political science and public policy and over-stressing the Cold War concerns of area studies."[92] Thus, a differentiation must be made between the issues that concerned scholars and the reasons why Government and private foundations were willing to support their work. Although it would be naïve to deny that Government benefited from their investment in African Studies. It would also be untrue to say that everything that was done in the field was dictated by government policy. This is a "partial and distorted vision of existing scholarship."[93]

It can be argued that scholars concerned with Africa have avoided involvement in political matters. A survey published in 1991 supported this view.[94] This survey showed, for example, that the majority of scholars interested in Africa in the United States hold faculty positions at universities, 81%. From these, 62% worked at graduate institutions. On the other hand, only 4.1% worked at U.S. Government agencies and just 2.7% at Non-Government organisations.[95] Although these figures cannot be taken as the whole story about the political involvement of scholars, it does give us an idea of how often they leave the field of academic work for that of policy making. The survey goes on to examine scholars' attitudes towards U.S. policy on Africa. The first issue that became clear is that scholars, in general, tend to disagree with these policies.

"On substantive issues of Africa policy, most Africanists sharply disagree with the official positions adopted by recent and current U.S. administrators. Africanists

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[92] Berger, I. "Contested boundaries: African studies approaching the Millennium. Presidential address to the 1996 African Studies Association Annual Meeting." *African Studies Review*. 40, (2), 1997. p. 3.

[93] *Ibidem*. p.3.

[94] Bratton, M., H. Reinhard, and D.S. Wiley. "How Africanists view U.S. Africa policy: results of a survey." *Issue*. 19, (2), 1991. pp.14-37. The survey was based on a list compiled from the ASA mailing list, regional associations, the Association of Scholars Concerned with Africa, and lists of faculty associated with African studies programs. The combination of these revealed a total population of 2592 academics involved in the study of Africa. From these, 606 returned questionnaires. The data was verified against information on the membership of ASA. This revealed significant similarities between the two sets of data. The survey also acknowledged that important groups of the community were probably not represented. Among these; development scientists, African Americans, and Africans who are not members of the ASA. pp. 14-16. Despite these limitations this survey serves my purpose of proving that the establishment of African scholars have been reluctant to get involved in political matters. This, in effect, has been also part of the criticism from African-American scholars since the 1960s.

[95] The remaining scholars worked in secondary schools (1.5%, Consulting firms (1.0%) and self-employed (2.2%). Bratton, M., H. Reinhard, and D.S. Wiley. *Op.cit.* 1991. p.14.

further express a firmly negative opinion of the overall effectiveness of U.S. foreign policy toward Africa. A clear majority (74.6%) disputes the proposition that "the long term political and economic interests of the United States are well served by current U.S. Africa policies" (8.1% agrees, 17.3% not sure)."[96]

Specialists on Africa, however, are sceptical about their chances of getting directly involved in policy making. The majority believe that this participation is limited to a "small group of insiders." Although they also acknowledged that their knowledge of the process was also inadequate.[97]

On their willingness to participate scholars agreed that: "...it is appropriate to attempt to become policy analysts and advocates. Respondents overwhelmingly rejected the proposition that Africanists scholars should restrict their activities to research and training and 'avoid involvement in the political process' (88.3% disagree). Similarly, the respondents support the notion that Africanists have 'an obligation' to use their expertise 'to participate actively in the formation of U.S. policy toward Africa (79.0% agree)."[98]

These discussions show how many scholars thought that to reinvigorate the study of Africa, its social and political relevance needed to be redefined. Many thought that "African studies can only prosper in this country if it is connected to constituencies that have an interest in our subject matter."[99] And this did not only refer to politicians. The most obvious of such constituencies was the African-American community.[100] What calls our attention is that no mention is made of how African History could be important to other historians. There is no attempt to explore the intellectual contributions of scholarship on Africa, which goes to show how African studies is founded on a discourse that isolates the knowledge about Africa from that of other areas of the world.

It seems to me that the notion of African studies has been unable to provide the necessary foundations for the establishment of a long-lasting scholarly tradition. It has given the impression that the study of Africa is regulated by different

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[96] *Ibidem.* p.16.

[97] Bratton, M., H. Reinhard, and D.S. Wiley.*Op.cit.* p.17.

[98] *Ibidem.* pp.18-20.

[99] Hyden, G. *Op.cit.* p.11.

[100] *Ibidem.* p.7.

norms and standards from those applied to other fields of research. If the academic community at large cannot be convinced of the value of researching the history, or the archaeology of Africa it is unlikely that the general public or funding bodies will be convinced. It is thus futile to reproduce the language of relevance or authenticity, which may well be the rhetoric that can secure some short-term funding or institutional support. All it does, in the end, is to reinforce the view that Africa should only be studied for moral or political reasons and that its study has no intellectual value.

Having looked at the general trends in the field of African studies I will turn now to the changes in the institutions that I have been following. The information available in archives for this period was considerably less than what was obtained for previous periods. Therefore, this section gives much less detail and relies more heavily on secondary material and oral information.

In 1998 the Program of African Studies at Northwestern celebrated its 50th anniversary. Much had changed since its creation, and African History, among the other fields, has seen significant progress within the Program. As it was seen before, PAS started its life without a professional historian of Africa. Despite the fact that it was an important program it took some time before a historian could be recruited and the offerings in history were expanded. In 1999 the situation was very different. There were five active historians and two retired professors. As in other pioneering institutions, a new generation was taking charge.

The road of the PAS, however, has not been easy. Form being one of the most important programs in the country, it eventually lost its status as a Title VI centre. This meant it stopped belonging to the select group of institutions that received this type of government funding. Despite this, PAS maintained a good reputation for the quality of its scholars and especially its library. After fifty years, it has managed to weather the funding cuts and the intellectual attacks relatively well. This does not mean, however, that it has remained unchanged. Looking into the Program booklet of the exhibition to celebrate the Fifty years of the PAS, one has the impression that the program has gone full-circle. The exhibition was called *Living Tradition in Africa & the Americas. The Legacy of Melville J. and Frances S.*

Herskovits.[101] One can hardly escape the irony of this title. One should remember that the intentions of the founder, Herskovits, were precisely to link the study of Africa to that of African-Americans. His intentions were lost in the political climate of the 1950s and 1960s, but have been re-valued in the last twenty years. Thus, in celebrating its Fiftieth anniversary by emphasising the importance of this relationship, the PAS not only recovered the original motivations of its founder, it also made a powerful and persuasive argument for its contemporary relevance and survival.

"*Living Traditions in Africa and the Americas: The Legacy of Melville J. and Frances S. Herskovits* celebrates the 50th anniversary of Northwestern University's Program of African Studies, founded by Melville Herskovits in 1948. The exhibition is intended both as a testimony of the work of the past and as a resource for the future. The legacy of Melville and Frances Herskovits -the Program of African Studies, the varied collections they assembled, their publications, and their passion for Africa and its diaspora -comes with an invitation: 'The road is open" to new frontiers of creativity by new generations of scholars and artists.'"[102]

This apparent shift does not mean that African-American studies have become its main focus. It continues to support all sorts of social and humanistic research in Africa. The history component has actually been reinforced and expanded with the inclusion of new members such as John Hunwick (Islam in Africa), Jonathon Glassman (Swahili resistance, labour and protest in Zanzibar and the East African coast), Carl Petry (Religious studies and judicial elites in medieval Egypt), Laurence Schiller (Precolonial political states of the Lakes Plateau Region of East Africa) and David Schoenbrun (Historical linguistics on the Great Lakes Region.) The arrival of a new, and larger generation of historians is a promising sign.

The African Studies Program at Wisconsin had been more successful in retaining its Title VI Centre status. To accomplish this, however, priorities had to change. As we saw in the previous chapter, there was a greater tendency to give more support to areas of professional development. In 1987, for example, one could read this in their Proposal to the Office of Education:

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[101] Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art. Northwestern University. *Living Tradition in Africa & the Americas. The Legacy of Melville J. and Frances S. Herskovits.* April 2- August 9, 1998.

[102] *Ibidem.* "Introduction."

"We have used our Title VI fellowships to encourage students outside the 'traditional' Letters and sciences disciplines to specialize in African studies (usually leading to a certificate minor). We have been pleased that, without altering the selection system that evaluates Title VI applications strictly according to merit, we have been able, in recent years, to award fellowships to students in Law, Business, Land Resources, Water resources, Environmental studies and Education."[103]

It is unclear how damaging this trend was for the study of history in particular. What is clear is that fewer students were choosing to obtain doctoral degrees in African History or Title VI fellowships in this area.[104]

The need for change was soon evident to Vansina, who became its chair in 1986. He found the program in a difficult financial situation. Funding was decreasing and private foundations were also considering cutting their support to African studies. It became clear that "African studies programs needed to change in order to survive."[105] The main concern of the foundations was to make research in the social sciences and humanities more relevant to contemporary issues in Africa. In the end, the radical cuts were avoided. But it was clear to everyone involved that financial support could no longer be taken for granted.

Changes in the administration of the University also had an impact in Vansina's memories of the time. This is not difficult to understand if one remembers that the study of Africa in Wisconsin had emerged and flourished with the support and backing of the University administration.[106] The new administration

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[103] "A proposal to the Department of Health Education and Welfare, U.S. Office of Education. Language and Area Centre Section... for Application for NDEA Title VI support for University of Wisconsin-Madison African Language and Area Centre. 1986-1987." Title VI Documents. *African Studies Program Records*. UWM. p.9.

[104] Memorandum to the directors of the Title VI Centers and Fellowship Programs from Ann. I. Schneider, Team leaders Centres and Fellowship Programs. Title VI fellowships awards, 1985-1988. Title VI Documents. *African Studies Program Records*. UWM. See also "Annual Performance Reports. 1982/83-1997/98." Title VI Documents. *African Studies Program Records*. UWM. One should not think that Title VI fellowships were the only kind of funding available to students and programs. But there is enough evidence to believe that the falling numbers of students going into history was a wide trend.

[105] Vansina, J. *Living with Africa*. 1994. p.224.

[106] One should remember that it was Fred Harrington who encouraged Curtin to apply for external funding, for the hiring of Vansina, and generally in the development of the program of Comparative Tropical History at a time when there was significant resistance in the History Department. One should also keep in mind that it was this lack of commitments that put the PAS at Northwestern in a difficult situation during the 1970s.

supported the view that the role of higher education was, in Vansina's words, "training for life," as opposed to transmission of knowledge. Thus, there was a greater emphasis on the pragmatic side of education and on undergraduate teaching. Under these circumstances, many areas of African Studies, particularly History, were at risk of being regarded as unnecessary.[107]

Besides these, Wisconsin also had to go through changes of staff. As in Northwestern and SOAS new recruits would soon have to take the positions left by the previous generation. In 1987 the search for a West Africanist was authorised, as a result the hiring of Kathryn Green was approved in 1988.[108] In 1989 Steve Feierman left Wisconsin for Florida and the search for a new specialist on East Africa started. In 1992-93 Thomas Spear was hired but almost at the same time Green decided to leave. Florence Bernaud later replaced her. The relative stability that Wisconsin had enjoyed for so many years came to an end, and it is still early to assess the impact of the new generation in the Wisconsin program.

These transitions were made more difficult by accusations of racism against the History Department. It becomes evident from the reading of some records that tensions were brewing over the need to recruit students and staff from ethnic minorities. Vansina comments on an incident related to the hiring of Kathryn Green. An African scholar who had been in charge of the outreach department had also applied for the job and when he did not get it sued the department for racial discrimination.[109] The case was finally settled by mutual agreement. Other echoes of this kind of conflict also appear in the records. When the department was searching for someone to replace Steve Feierman they thought of hiring a well regarded African scholar. However, the discussions among members of the department show that other concerns were also taken into account. A member of staff claimed mixed emotions about the appointment: "Africans are equated with African-Americans as Blacks, but when Black students say they want Black professors, they want someone who, like themselves, is a product of the African-

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[107] Vansina, J. *Op.cit.* 1994. p. 226.

[108] Minute, February 3, 1988. History Department. *Minutes of the Executive Committee.* UWMA.

[109] Vansina, J. *Op.cit.* 1994. p.226.

American historical experience. Black students, while welcoming Africans, want African-Americans hired."[110]

These discussions show how contested the question of "who can teach African History?" can be, and how historians in the United States seem to depend more and more on their ability to justify their work in terms of its relevance to the African-American population.

It seems clear that this need has been caused by the financial threat that has been imposed on the study of Africa in general and on history in particular. Historians of Africa have been generally unable to convince other historians that the study of the African past is a valid intellectual enterprise. Therefore, they have not only lost the support of politicians and funding bodies, they have also isolated themselves from the academic community at large.

Part 2.- Postmodernism and African History.

In the last section I examined how the declining status of African studies in the institutional setting encouraged the construction of a discourse of relevance to justify the study of Africa. There were, however, trends from within the discipline that encouraged this type of discourse. Particularly the increasing trend of producing a History that could challenge established power and, at the same time, devolves this to marginalised communities.

It is difficult to define which approaches or interests have been predominant among historians of Africa during the last twenty years. Gender, identity, demography, the environment, are only a few of a number of issues that have attracted historical research in the last two decades. There are, in my view, two aspects of recent historical work that can reveal some of the main problems in African History. First, the decline in the study of precolonial Africa, and second, the impact of postmodernism.

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[110] Minute February 17, 1989. History Department. *Minutes of the Executive Committee*. UWMA. The department finally voted in favour of offering the position to this African scholar, however, in the end he decided to take another offer.

The project of producing African History has emphasised, since the 1950s, the importance of Precolonial history. At the beginning, this was due to the need to prove that Africa had had a history previous to colonial intervention. However, the importance of research in the precolonial period goes beyond this mere assertion. Investigating the deep past of Africa has proven to be a significant challenge for historians. This challenge has produced some of the most significant contributions from African History to world historiography. The work done on oral traditions is the best example of this. However, there are still many aspects of this kind of research that historians need to explore further. One of the most important, in my opinion, is the issue of interdisciplinary research. Few fields in history demand such a span of disciplines to contribute in the reconstruction of the past. Yet, historians of Africa still have to reflect further on the ways in which the many problems attached to interdisciplinary work can be solved. This is just one of the many areas in which careful and reflective work by historians of Africa can make significant contributions to our understanding of illiterate societies all over the world.

Something that continues to be a concern among many historians that I spoke to is the decline of research on precolonial African History. An old defender of the importance of the precolonial past, Jan Vansina, says: "... the existence of such a gap in everyone's knowledge about our common past should in itself interest historians everywhere, for the past of equatorial Africa is as relevant to the human experience as any other."[111] Research on the precolonial past poses a significant challenge for modern historiography, not only because it is costly, time-consuming, and in some areas of Africa practically impossible, but also because our understanding of oral, archaeological, and linguistic evidence continues to be quite limited.

"Part of the challenge is to find a methodology that will make better use of other traces of the past than written documents or oral traditions. If that methodology is fruitful and valid in equatorial Africa, it can be equally fruitful and valid in similar situations elsewhere in the world."[112]

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[111] Vansina, J. *Paths in the Rainforests. Towards a history of political tradition in Equatorial Africa.* Madison, 1990.p. XI.

[112] *Ibidem.*

It is this search for a new methodology which lies behind his book *Paths in the rainforests* where he applies techniques from historical linguistics to the study of political traditions in equatorial Africa. The use of historical linguistics had been proposed since the 1960s for the reconstruction of African History. However, few historians took up the challenge of developing this field. There were also problems with the use that could be made of linguistic evidence in the absence of other kinds of evidence such as archaeological remains or ethnographic research. Forty years on and the situation has not improved significantly, although at least now historians seem to be more aware of the limitations of interdisciplinary research.[113] Vansina offers a lengthy discussion of the ways in which historical linguistics have evolved and why it has been possible for him to use such techniques for his reconstruction of the past.[114] What is slightly ironic from this book is the fact that it relies primarily on written documents, and not on oral sources or extended fieldwork. This illustrates how an innovative methodological approach and rigorous source criticism can produce a solid piece of historical research. It also shows, however, that the historian needs to have a very good understanding of his sources and the techniques he uses if he is to be successful in such an exercise.

Unfortunately, Vansina's work is exceptional. The study of precolonial Africa has not disappeared, but it has declined significantly. The number of historians who can handle the methods and techniques of linguistics, anthropology or archaeology are very small. The production of precolonial Africa certainly required such knowledge if it is to avoid the mistakes of the past. Historians of Africa also need to reflect more critically on the wider issue of interdisciplinarity. This is not a problem exclusive to African History. In the last thirty years it has become very fashionable to talk about interdisciplinary research, and it seems to me there are still many question marks around how this can be achieved. Historians of precolonial Africa are in a good position to reflect on this problem.

Therefore, forty years since research in precolonial Africa began, historians seem to be faced with very similar questions. The reasons for this are both pragmatic

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[113] See for example Spear, T. "The interpretation of evidence in African History." *African Studies Review.* 30, (2), 1987. 17-24.

[114] Vansina, J. *Op.cit.* 1990. pp.10-16.

and intellectual. Given the decline in funding, it has become very difficult to sustain the kind of training and research needed for the development of research in this area. This has also prevented members of other disciplines, particularly archaeology, to conduct research in Africa. It is not a coincidence that the discipline that seems to have developed more since the 1960s is linguistics, which needs relatively less resources than archaeology.

Research on precolonial history has also suffered because of the large emphasis given to research on the colonial past. Attempts to understand and explain to what extent Africa was transformed by European domination have been top of the agenda for the vast majority of historians. Unfortunately, any significant understanding of changes experienced under colonial domination will always be lacking if we ignore the precolonial past. The division between precolonial and colonial has proven to be misleading when it comes to understanding how Africans experienced colonial domination. Therefore, this imbalance between the study of the recent and the deep past of Africa is in itself a problem that historians have to address.

The impact of postmodernism has also brought significant challenges to the study of History as a whole and of African History in particular. During the last fifty years, history and other disciplines have been under severe attack.

"There is no satisfactory term with which to describe the multiple but loosely convergent assaults on received notions of objectivity which swept across the academic world from the 1960s onward. The most common designation is 'postmodern'...the locution is symbolic of a circumstance of chaos, confusion, and crisis, in which everyone has a strong suspicion that conventional norms are no longer viable, but no one has a clear sense of what is in the making."[115]

An element of the postmodern situation is the questioning of the forms in which knowledge, particularly social knowledge, is produced. For example, post-structuralist theories, particularly those originated in France, highlight the role of historical narratives as tools of oppression. Intellectuals like Foucault underline the relationship between knowledge and power and put it at the centre of

[115] Novick, P. *That Noble Dream. The 'Objectivity question' and the American historical profession.* 1988.p. 523-24.

historical research. In Young's opinion the element that best characterises this approach is:

"...the relationship of the enlightenment, its grand projects and universal truth-claims, to the history of European colonialism. This need not necessarily involve a direct analysis of the effects of colonialism as such, but can also consist of a relentless anatomization of the collusive forms of European knowledge. For Foucault this has comprised a vigorous critique of historicism, including Marxist historicism, and its relations to the operations of knowledge and power."[116]

Thus, an important characteristic of the post-modern situation is the rejection of universal narratives. By questioning the notion of "the universal" -either values or knowledge- it emphasises the particular and contingent. Therefore, it introduces a level of relativism that underlines the need to understand cultures in their own right. Scholars have also shifted their attention from the objects of knowledge to the structures of knowledge. By doing this, greater emphasis has been given to the relationships of power within colonialism and their effects on the production of knowledge.

The emergence of schools of thought that particularly address issues of inequality and oppression in the context of the production of knowledge has been a characteristic of the postmodern situation. Postcolonial theory is an example of these. The development of Postcolonial theory was influenced by the work of Edward Said in his book *Orientalism.* Its main impact can be seen on the area of literary criticism. However, it has also encouraged the emergence of the Subaltern school of South Asian history.

"...the significance of their project lies in the writing of histories freed from the will of the colonial and national elites. It is this project of resisting colonial and nationalist discursive hegemonies, through histories of the subaltern whose identity resides in difference, which makes the work of these scholars a significant intervention in third world historiography."[117]

The problem with this project is that it focuses its attention on the discursive level. As Vaughan states: "In particular they are concerned with the question (though they don't pose it in this way) of how colonial discourse works, how the

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[116] Young, R. *White mythologies: writing history and the west.* 1990. p.9.

[117] Prakash, G. "Writing post-Orientalist histories of the third world: perspective from Indian historiography." *Comparative Studies in Society and History.* 32, 1990. pp. 400-401.

texts of Orientalism, for example take their effect, not only within the Western mind, but also on the consciousness and the very constitution of colonial peoples themselves."[118]

One cannot say that the history of Africa has been dominated by the ideas of the subaltern tradition. However, one does find some instances in which this influence has been important. There have been, for example, few attempts to reconstruct the European discourse about Africa as a whole. The most noteworthy example has been the attempt by the African philosopher Valentin Mudimbe in his works *The Invention of Africa* (1988) and *The Idea of Africa* (1994).

Some historians have taken to the task of studying the production of particular discourses on Africa. Examples of this have appeared in Southern African History were the issue of representation has been popular among historians and has been commonly seen as a crucial element to be incorporated in new forms of historical analysis.[119] Even though historians have remained cautious not to put too much emphasis on the problem of discourse and representation.

"The analysis of discourses about the past, however, is not seen as a substitute for the analysis of the past, but as an extension. The quest for retrieving the past can be enriched by exploring the links between analytical perspectives on the one hand, and the location of scholars in the social and discursive relations on the other, both are integral to the study of history."[120]

Other authors have attempted to put the problem of discourse and representation at the centre of their research. The work of David William Cohen has been the most visible in this respect.[121] In *Burying SM*, for example, one can see the emphasis put on the dynamics of discourse and history. In this book the authors analyse the court debates that surrounded the burial of S.M. Otieno, a prominent

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[118] Vaughan, M. "Colonial discourse theory and African History, or has postmodernism passed us by?" *Social Dynamics*. 20, (2), 1994. p.3.

[119] Greenstein, R."The future of South African past." *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 22, (2), 1996. p.331.

[120] *Ibidem*.p. 331.

[121] Cohen, D.W. "Doing social history from Pim's doorway." Zunz, O. (ed.) *Reliving the past: the worlds of social history*. 1985. *The combing of history*. 1994. With E.S. Atieno Odhiambo. *Siaya: a historical anthropology of an African landscape*. 1989. And *Burying SM: The politics of knowledge and the sociology of power in Kenya*. 1992.

Kenyan/Luo lawyer.[122] The book concentrates on the analysis of the discursive strategies displayed at court. It looks at the uses of representations of the past and at the relationships of power implied in such discourses, from politics to gender.

"...we should remind ourselves that this grand, conflicted discourse on tradition, culture, philosophy, gender, and law is not simply a product of a postmodern context in which all things are thrown up for fresh evaluation and redefinition. Indeed, we have sought to focus not only upon the expansive and creative production of culture and history in the courts of Kenya but also upon the constraints, rigidities, and economies that have informed the construction of these historical and cultural contexts."[123]

Following this idea, it is important to note that the power relations examined throughout the book are not limited to any one particular structure. In other words the discourses analysed by Cohen and Odhiambo do not originate solely from colonial relationships. On the contrary, the voices analysed in this text look at a multiplicity of discourses that converge in attempts to define the past. However, the origins of these voices are varied and their legitimation is dependent on a multiplicity of elements such as social status, political power, and gender. Therefore, Cohen and Odhiambo have gone beyond an opposition between colonial discourse and the voices of the colonial peoples. In doing so, they have identified one of the problems that has been very important in the historiography of Africa for the last twenty years; the invention of tradition and the construction of identity. The importance of this problem cannot be underestimated. If one can accept that national, ethnic and other kind of identities are the result of a multiplicity of historical and social negotiations, then it is possible to question the notion of a unified, stable and non-problematic notion of Africa and its peoples. In other words, it is a step towards not taking Africa for granted and accepting its constantly changing state.

The "constructivist" paradigm as it has been called, originates from the Post-colonial idea that peoples are, in one way or another, created by discourses of knowledge and power. However, historians of Africa seem to have chosen to reflect further on the different levels in which this construction or invention may

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[122] Part of the problem of this book is precisely the definition of identities in the interface between precolonial, colonial and postcolonial discourses. For that reason the question of was SM a Kenyan or a Luo is particularly important in this book.

[123] Cohen, D.W *Burying SM. The politics of knowledge and sociology of power in Kenya.* 1992. p.97.

occur. One particular problem that has been often examined is of course the question of how these identities and traditions are created and by whom. By asking these questions historians return to the issue of African agency. But the way in which agency is being understood by recent scholarship of Africa is more complex than it was some forty years ago. As Vaughan says: "Work by historians of Africa on 'the construction of custom' can, then, be seen as an attempt to capture the process by which 'colonial discourses' and practices were created out of the face-to-face encounters of colonizer and colonized."[124] This approach reveals not only a significant departure from Post-colonial theory; it also presents a much more complex notion of agency in which colonial discourses are incorporated as an integral part of the African experience.

The problem that some historians of Africa have found on the approach of postcolonial theorists is that, by concentrating on the construction of colonial discourses, the study of what happened to those who were colonised has been neglected.

"There is no doubt, of course, that postcolonial theorists dislike colonialism and despise its social sciences. The colonial period was a time of distortion through power: power was used to force Africans into distorting identities; power relations distorted colonial social science, rendering it incapable of doing more than reflecting colonial constructions. But at the same time many postcolonialist accounts of contemporary Africa...oddly privilege colonialism."[125]

Research on the construction of identities in Africa has gone beyond the sole element of colonial discourse. Several publications on this topic show how historians are looking at a number of factors such as economic activity, political organisations, language and other cultural manifestations, as elements that contribute to the creation of identities. This research has forced historians to look at the contradictions in Post-colonial theory and at the limitations that had affected their own work for years. Agency is no longer seen as a mere function of colonial positioning and intervention (as was the case with formulations like African initiative and resistance). Agency now can be something that has to be explained rather than proven. As something more related to adaptation and

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[124] Vaughan, M. *Op.cit.* pp.12-13.

[125] Ranger, T.O. "Postscript. Colonial and Postcolonial identities." Werbner, R. & T. Ranger (eds.) *Postcolonial identities in Africa.* 1996. p.273.

incorporation rather that collaboration or rejection. In a similar way, historians have learned from their investigation on identities that the strong chronological divisions that they were used to employing do not allow them to understand the processes of change and continuity that occur at different levels. It soon became obvious that they were not dealing with one chronology but with a number of different chronologies that intersected and interlocked in different spaces at different times.

Three examples show the potential richness and depth of modern African historiography: Van Onselen's, *The Seed is Mine*, Rathbone's *Murder in Colonial Ghana* and Ranger's *Are we not also men?* These texts do not have a particular state or a specific region as the centre of analysis. They concentrate on the histories of a specific group of people and follow them across the temporal boundaries of the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. By doing so they show that the ways in which these individuals saw themselves were far from the common dichotomies of the colonised and the coloniser. In these works we see an exploration of the possibility of looking at the historical process as something that grows organically as well as chronologically. In other words, the past is linked to the present not just by a temporal line, but also by qualitative social relations. Thus, the history of Africans under colonialism cannot be properly understood without knowing how Africans incorporated the colonial experience as part of their own personal histories and not just as an external imposition. In this respect Van Onselen is right in reminding us that "the troublesome relationship of black and white South Africans cannot be fully understood by focusing on what tore them apart and ignoring what held them together. The history of a marriage, even an unhappy one, is inscribed in the wedding bans as well as the divorce notice."[126] He reminds us that the understanding of colonial and postcolonial identities in Africa makes little sense if we have no way of knowing what was there before. In other words, how did Africans identify themselves before colonial constructions became influential? This reinforces the idea stated earlier about the importance of precolonial research.

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[126] Van Onselen, C. *The seed is mine. The life of Kas Maine a South African sharecropper, 1894-1985.* 1996. p.

These works also illustrate some of the problems that historians of Africa usually face. This depth of analysis was only possible because the three authors were able to draw on rich sources that are not common in all areas of Africa. They were also able to penetrate on the intimate lives of people who had been careful observers of their surroundings, able manipulators of their environment and both exceptional and representative of their times and peoples. Unfortunately, not all historical research in Africa can benefit from the same amount and quality of sources.

It seems to me that African History is finally moving away from the question "is modern Africa a product of colonialism?" This is certainly a welcome development, but it uncovers a number of problems that historians have been unable to solve. The most important are those related to the study of the precolonial past. I cannot offer solutions to these problems but in my view the first thing that historians should remember is that the discipline of African History is still quite young. The secrets of Greece and Rome were not uncovered in fifty years and the African past is a more serious challenge.

CONCLUSIONS.

The history of African history in the last fifty years looks like a story with two endings. One shows a field that has been able to successfully develop and expand. Another presents a field in constant struggle for survival, and on the brink of disappearing if radical changes are not introduced. The reason why we have ended up with these contradictory endings lies in the way historians of Africa defined the field fifty years ago.

In the 1950s African history emerged as a project for the "decolonisation of history." At that point, this meant the production of a history that could contribute to the political and social development of African countries after independence. It also aimed at producing a history that was free of the prejudices of colonial historiography. The quest for decolonisation thus, implied the notions of "relevance" and "authenticity" as basic components of the New African History. We have seen how these ideas have been constantly used by historiographers to evaluate the success or failure of African History. The final balance has not been favourable to the field. The criticism against its colonial and neo-colonial approaches has increased, and the attacks upon its isolation from the aspirations and concerns of African people have become more intense.

At the same time, we have witnessed the emergence of a field plagued with significant epistemological problems. The study of the African past arguably poses one of the most daunting challenges to the historian. The number of sources is limited, and its interpretation is often problematic. Moreover, few fields rely so heavily on the practice of interdisciplinary research. This, in itself, is a minefield of questions, problems and hidden traps. Still, the field has been able to produce a good amount of fine works, and to convince some sectors of the academic community of its potential intellectual value.

These two endings tell us how the expectations for African history have been divided. On the one hand, it has expected to fulfil the moral and political requirements of the era of decolonisation. On the other, it has been hoped that it will become an established field of historical research. After fifty years of evaluating the work of historians according to these expectations, it is time to reflect upon their viability and importance.

We should first think about the meaning of decolonisation in the context of African history. What does this mean? Historians have long reflected upon the importance of the colonial period in African history, and about the impact of colonial historiography on our understanding of the African past. The result of this has been to identify "the colonial" element in African history as something that is external to the development of Africa. In other words, Africa has been defined in opposition to "the colonial." This definition emphasises the idea that the value of African history lies in its independence from colonial history. We have seen, however, how colonial history has never been clearly defined, and how, in most cases, the idea that African history should be independent from Western history as a whole. Is this a realistic expectation? Can African history reject all notions of time, causation and objectivity? Should African history turn its back to the principles of critical examination of evidence? These are the building blocks that sustain what professional history is. Notions like civilisation, Nation, and progress -which have been heavily criticised by historians of Africa- were crucial in the grand narratives of the nineteenth century, but they are not the foundation of the historical discipline. Even historians of Europe have searched for new forms of interpretation since it became obvious that these concepts were revealing just partial histories. Therefore, it should be possible for historians of Africa to exclude such notions without having to also reject the epistemological principles of the discipline.

We have seen how these epistemological principles have come under severe attack. It is true to say that our way of understanding knowledge and its production is going through significant changes. Does this mean it is time to simply reject all these principles? No one would deny that our confidence on the notions of truth and objectivity has been severely reduced. Nobody can argue either that the consequences of surrendering to absolute relativism would not be near to catastrophic. Would any evaluation of knowledge be possible under such circumstances? Therefore, although it is true that the rules are changing, this does not mean there are no rules. As long as we agree on the dangers of absolute relativism we have to abide to the principles we have learned, taking into account its limitations.

Having said this one can argue that it is unrealistic for historians of Africa to expect that African History should be a completely independent field of historical

research. Moreover, the idea that African History can simply define itself for its relevance and authenticity, which are basically moral and political values, goes against the view that history should aim to be critical and objective. Morals and politics will always be a factor in the writing of history. Nobody can deny that such issues have a role to play. However, historians should be able to go beyond these concerns when it comes to proving the validity of their work. Otherwise, we would be getting dangerously close to the point in which any historical statement would be valid simply because it provides a political advantage or a moral point. I think most of us will agree that this is would be unacceptable.

To say that the evaluation of African History according to the standards of relevance and authenticity should not be a major concern of professional historians does not mean that the history of the field has been completely successful. African History still has a steep hill to climb when it comes to proving itself among other fields of historical research. As we saw, the fact that so many discussions have been focused on the issues of relevance and authenticity is proof that African History has yet to convince a larger portion of the academic establishment. Can historians of Africa achieve this end?

I think it is important to remember that the problems in the study of African History have been many and significant. This is a field in which the lack of sources is only matched by the lack of resources that have been put into it. To this one should add that it is a very young area of research. Historians should accept that there are many limitations to what we can know about the African past. Were we to overcome any of these, we should also acknowledge that, we would need to attract more financial and human resources. There is also a need to reflect more seriously on the best ways of approaching interdisciplinary research. This issue cannot be taken for granted. Finally, we need to become closer to other areas of history. Who knows? We may even realise that the problems and questions we face are not so unique. We may discover that we can actually make some contributions to other areas. We need to overcome our fears about Africa being this mysterious "other" that cannot be understood or approached. The study of such "other" is the bread and butter of all historians, not just of historians of Africa. As Millers says:

"Historical inquiry -and historians are above all, questioners- requires the challenge of the unknown to spark the curious imagination. History derives its essential energy from explaining difference, from the tension of the distance that separates historian and subject."[1]

Therefore, the challenge of uncovering the past of African societies is something that has to be seen as an opportunity for historical creativity and intellectual enquiry, and not only as a moral or political imperative. In the end, the writing of any kind of history can only engage our imagination and influence our lives if it can first prove its intellectual value.

[1] Miller, J. "History and Africa/Africa and History." *American Historical Review*. 104, (1), 1999. p. 25.

Appendix I.

"African peoples attending the ASA conference have demanded that the study of African life be undertaken from a Pan-Africanist perspectives [sic].

This perspective defines that all black people are African peoples and negates the tribalization of African peoples by geographical demarcations on the basis of colonialist spheres of influence. This position was enunciated at the negotiating meeting with the Board of Directors of the ASA this afternoon.

Specifically, in order to reflect this perspective, African peoples demanded that the following changes be made in the ideological and structural basis of the organization which purports the study, research and teach authoritatively about African peoples and culture:

1. - The ideological framework of ASA which perpetuates colonialism and neocolonialism through the "educational" institutions and the mass media should be changed immediately.

2.- The constitutional procedures, which provide for the election of a predominant White Board of Directors to decide upon the scholarship, study and research of African life should be changed immediately to deal truthfully and realistically with African peoples.

3. - In accordance to the above the new Board of Directors of ASA, should be composed of twelve members -six Africans and six Europeans.

4. - That the ASA give financial support to the African students of Sir George Williams University in Montreal, Canada, who are now political prisoners of a colonialist government, and that the ASA make a strong public statement indicating the abhorrence of the situation.

5. - The rules governing the membership to ASA be amended so as to allow African scholars total participation in the Association.

6. - The criteria for allocation of funds for research and publications of the study of African life should be established by a committee of equal members of Africans and Europeans

In a plenary session of the African peoples, it was unanimously agreed that the ASA Board's token offer of three African representatives on a twelve member board of directors, the other nine being elected according regular procedures. The plenary session of African peoples considered the ASA Board's offer irresponsible and insulting.

The plenary session reiterated that African peoples will no longer permit our people to be raped culturally, economically, and intellectually merely to provide European scholars with intellectual status symbols of African artifacts hanging in their living rooms and irrelevant and injurious lectures of their classrooms."*

* *African Studies Newsletter.* II, 6-7. 1969.

Appendix II.

Main Points of the Proposal by Fred Burke.

"1.- The ASA would establish a committee of 30 people to re-examine the purposes and goals of the Association and to drastically revise its Constitution and organization.

2.- These 30 people would be elected by all members of the ASA and, in addition, by anyone else attending the present conference.

3.- Half the members of the committee would be black.

4.- The proposal of the committee would be submitted by mail to all ASA members for their approval by April 15, 1970.

5.- Nomination for the committee would be accepted from all those registered at the present conference.

6.- The ASA would provide funds for the operation of the committee.

7.- The committee would have as its terms of reference that regardless of all other decisions on reconstituting ASA, at least half of the members of the new Board of Directors must be Black."*

* *African Studies Newsletter.* II, 6-7. 1969. p.3.

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